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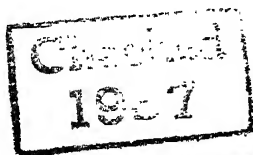
Other volumes in preparation

# WILLIAM PITT

by SIR CHARLES PETRIE, Bt.

Great Lives

15 695.  
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LONDON

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Made and printed in Great Britain  
By The Camelot Press Ltd  
London and Southampton

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## CHRONOLOGY

1759. May 28th. Born.  
1778. May 11th. Death of Chatham.  
1781. Jan. 23rd. Takes seat as M.P. for Appleby.  
1781. Feb. 26th. Maiden speech in House of Commons.  
1782. July. Chancellor of the Exchequer.  
1783. Feb. 24th. Resignation of the Shelburne Ministry.  
1783. Sept.—Oct. Visit to France.  
1783. Dec. 19th. Prime Minister.  
1784. Aug. Introduces India Bill.  
1785. April 18th. Introduces Bill for Parliamentary Reform.  
1786. March. Indian Amending Act.  
1786. May. Sinking Fund established.  
1786. Sept. 26th. Commercial Treaty with France signed.  
1788. April. Triple Alliance formed.  
1788. May 11th. Impeachment of Warren Hastings.  
1788. Nov. Insanity of the King.  
1789. Feb. 5th. Introduces Regency Bill.

1789. July 14th. Storming of the Bastille.
1790. Nov. Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*.
1792. Aug. British Ambassador withdrawn from Paris.
1793. Feb. 1st. France declares war on Great Britain.
1794. May. Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.
1794. July. Portland Whigs join the Ministry.
1797. Feb. 26th. Cash payments suspended.
1798. May-Sept. Irish Rebellion.
1800. Aug. 1st. Union with Ireland.
1801. Mar. 14th. Resigns on King's refusal to adopt Catholic Emancipation.
1802. Mar. 25th. Treaty of Amiens.
1803. May 18th. Renewal of war with France.
1804. May 10th. Prime Minister.
1805. June. Impeachment of Melville.
1805. Oct. 21st. Battle of Trafalgar.
1805. Dec. 2nd. Battle of Austerlitz.
1806. Jan. 23rd. Died.



## CHAPTER I

Birth — early years — Cambridge — friends — the Bar — entry into Parliament — Chancellor of the Exchequer — in Opposition to the Fox-North Coalition — Prime Minister.

WILLIAM PITT was born at Hayes, in Kent, on May 28th, 1759, the second son of that William Pitt who was soon to be Earl of Chatham, and Hester Grenville. His birth thus took place in the year which witnessed his father's greatest triumphs as a minister, when Canada was won for Great Britain, and Hawke destroyed the French fleet in Quiberon Bay. From the beginning Chatham showed himself devoted to his younger boy, whom he described as "the hope and comfort of my life," and he spared no effort so to bring up the latter that he should be able to enter upon a public career at the earliest possible moment. The mother's influence upon her son was purely domestic ; but, for all that, William was more of a Grenville than of a Pitt. He was reserved to an extent unknown in his father, and in later life this aloofness became a definite handicap, for it cut him off from that knowledge of public opinion which a more genial man would easily have acquired by intercourse with friends and acquaintances. In looks, too, he resembled his

mother's family, not least in the nose, so dear to the caricaturists, from which he was said to suspend the House of Commons.

Chatham had been at Eton, but he had little use for the public-school system of his day, which he told Shelburne "might suit a boy of a turbulent, forward disposition, but would not do where there was any gentleness." Moreover, William was delicate, so he was handed over to a tutor from his sixth to his fourteenth year. That he was precocious is obvious from the progress which he made in spite of the fact that his studies were often interrupted by illness. He lived at Hayes and at Burton Pynsent, the latter an estate some nine miles from Taunton which had been presented to Chatham by an admirer. Reasons of health, however, necessitated frequent visits to Lyme Regis and Weymouth, and in these early years he spent much time on the Dorset coast with his brothers and sisters, of whom there were four.

Chatham played the predominant part in moulding the character of his son. From the beginning the father determined to make a statesman of the boy, and the latter's education was wholly directed to that end. It was a regular custom for Chatham and William to read together from the Bible or some other great classic, and there can be no doubt but that the complete mastery of the English language which Pitt displayed from the moment he entered Parliament



was due to these lessons from a parent who was himself one of the greatest orators in an age of great oratory. By the time he was seven he could also write a very good letter in Latin. On the other hand, this forcing of the youthful mind was not, as is so often the case with the brilliant, without its drawbacks. Pitt had no boyhood worth the name, and he developed so early that he was mentally fully grown when it would have been better for him had his mind still been receptive. Given his naturally reserved nature, inherited from his Grenville ancestors, this drove Pitt in upon himself : and although in many ways the result was a source of strength, it was occasionally a cause of weakness, and it cut him off from all save a few intimate friends. That at times Pitt appeared scarcely human was in no small measure due to his upbringing.

In October, 1773, he went up to Pembroke Hall (now College), Cambridge, but his continued bad health prevented him from mixing with the other undergraduates to the extent that would have been beneficial to one of his temperament. He rode a good deal, and fenced a little. Such letters as survive from this period rarely refer to any amusements, but the fact that towards the end of his time at Cambridge he is found confessing that he had exceeded his allowance by sixty pounds may perhaps be construed as evidence that the normal relaxations of a young man were not

entirely unknown to him. It is also proof that from the beginning one of Britain's greatest Chancellors of the Exchequer was unable to balance his personal budget. Pitt had for a tutor one Dr. Pretymann, who later changed his name to Tomline, and became Bishop of Lincoln. The influence of this reverend gentleman upon his pupil may be guessed from his subsequent biography of him, which is one of the dullest ever written. He quite obviously felt it improper to display his hero in undress for the benefit of posterity, and he was certainly not the man to have encouraged him to relax among his contemporaries. In this way Pitt was deprived of those social benefits which most men derive from their years at the University. It is, however, true that but few of his fellow-undergraduates were of outstanding ability, while not long before he went down he formed what was destined to be a lifelong friendship with Wilberforce. Other Cambridge acquaintances were Lords Westmorland, Granby, Euston, Lowther, together with Pepper Arden, Eliot, Bankes, and Long. Some of these were to be associated with his political career.

If Pitt's social life at Cambridge was not as full as it might have been, his application left nothing to be desired. He was only fourteen when he went into residence, and in the following year he is found able to translate six or seven pages of

Thucydides at sight without making more than one or two mistakes. Mathematics were not neglected, but his education was primarily classical, though it was probably at Cambridge that he found time to read Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, which had a profound influence upon his economic policy as Prime Minister. The vacations were spent at Hayes or Burton Pynsent, while there were frequent visits to Westminster to hear the debates in both Houses of Parliament.

On April 7th, 1778, Pitt himself took part in one of the most memorable scenes in British history. The War of American Independence had been going on for nearly two years, and France had recently come to the aid of the Americans. Chatham, now in the last stage of infirmity, appeared in the House of Lords, swathed in flannel, and leaning on the arms of his sons, William and James. The speech that followed was largely in conflict with the views which he had expressed for years, but that the old fire still burned was proved when he exclaimed, "Shall this great kingdom now fall prostrate before the House of Bourbon? . . . If we must fall, let us fall like men." A second effort was too much, and Chatham collapsed in the Chamber itself. He was removed to Hayes, where he lingered for a month on the point of death. One incident of this last illness deserves to be recorded in the biography of his son, for he made William read

to him from the Iliad those verses which describe the burial of Hector and the sorrow of Troy. On May 11th Chatham died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. William was the chief mourner, in the absence on active service of his elder brother, the new Earl of Chatham. King George III, whom the dead man had served so faithfully and so long, was unrepresented at the funeral.

The loss of a father is generally a turning-point in life, and so it was with Pitt. The death of Chatham deprived him of an inspiration as well as a parent, but it animated him with the determination to show his devotion to his father's memory by upholding his principles in public life. Materially, Pitt was considerably a loser by what had happened. Chatham had been more lavish than he could afford, and, in spite of a vote of £20,000 by Parliament towards the payment of his debts, his widow was by no means entirely freed from financial anxiety. As for William, his share of the estate brought him in an income of but £250 a year, which was hopelessly inadequate for one of his ambitions. During the eighteen months which elapsed after his father's death, he alternated between Burton Pynsent, Cambridge, and Lincoln's Inn. On June 12th, 1780, he was called to the Bar, but it was already obvious that politics, not the law, were to be the preoccupation of his life.

Pitt entered the political arena at a moment when Great Britain was at the very nadir of her fortunes. She was at war with the United States, France, Spain, and Holland, and it was only the incompetence of her enemies that had so far prevented actual invasion. The Prime Minister was Lord North, a coarse and genial man, whose hold upon the House of Commons was secured by an extensive system of corruption, and by the firm support of the King, whose instrument he was. Gone were the days when the first two Georges had been the puppets of the Whig oligarchy, which alone kept them on their uneasy throne. The long twilight of Jacobitism had at last deepened into night, and those whose creed was Church and King diverted their allegiance from Stuart to Guelph. George III had not been slow to take advantage of this change in his favour, and the Crown was more powerful than it had been since the reign of James II. The Opposition was divided between the old Whigs, who had so long dominated the political scene, led by the amiable Marquess of Rockingham, and a group of independents which had formed round Chatham, but were now under the leadership of the Earl of Shelburne.

The Government had recently lost a good deal of ground owing to its unsuccessful conduct of the war, and on April 6th, 1780, the House of Commons passed a resolution that "the influence of

the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished" by 233 votes to 215. Throughout the session feeling ran very high, and more than one duel was fought as a result of what was said in debate. The ministry, however, was saved from defeat not so much by its own efforts as by the outbreak of the Gordon Riots in June. A crisis of this nature usually ranges the average Englishman on the side of the Government of the day ; and the courage displayed by the King, when the ordinary authorities were afraid to take action, naturally redounded to the credit of a ministry which was so peculiarly his own as that of North. Similarly, the Opposition was compromised by the violent speeches of some of its members, which were felt to have provided an incitement to the Gordon rioters. This change in public opinion was not lost upon the King, who, whatever his faults as a monarch, was an astute politician ; and, in September, Parliament, which had been elected in 1774, was dissolved.

The dissolution found Pitt on the Western Circuit, at Exeter. In the previous year he had already determined to stand for Cambridge University at the first opportunity, and he now proceeded to do so. However, neither his youth nor his talents appealed to that electorate, and he was decisively beaten. Pitt accepted his reverse philosophically, but he had not long to wait before a seat was offered to him. Difficult as it is

to defend the pocket boroughs on any logical grounds, it has to be admitted that they enabled young men to enter the House of Commons at an age which is now impossible, and the number of those, returned for the first time in this way, who subsequently achieved fame, is remarkable. In the present instance it was Sir James Lowther, with no less than nine close boroughs at his disposal, who encouraged youthful genius, and the circumstances in which Pitt was returned to Parliament are best described by himself :

“ Lincoln’s Inn,

“ *Thursday Night, Nov. 1780.*

“ MY DEAR MOTHER, – I can now inform you that I have seen Sir James Lowther, who has repeated to me the offer he had before made, and in the handsomest manner. Judging from my father’s principles, he concludes that mine would be agreeable to his own, and on that ground – to me of all others the most agreeable – to bring me in. No kind of condition was mentioned, but that if ever our lines of conduct should become opposite, I should give him an opportunity of choosing another person. On such liberal terms I could certainly not hesitate to accept the proposal, than which nothing could be in any respect more agreeable. Appleby is the place I am to represent, and the election will be made (probably in a week or  
BP

ten days) without my having any trouble, or even visiting my constituents. I shall be in time to be spectator and auditor *at least* of the important scene after the holidays. I would not defer confirming to you this intelligence, which I believe you will not be sorry to hear.

“ I am, my dear Mother, etc.,  
“ W. PITT.”

Appleby duly obeyed the instructions of Sir James Lowther, and Pitt took his seat on January 23rd, 1781.

The result of the General Election was proof of the shrewdness of the King, for the ministry came back with a majority of about seventy. Burke lost his seat at Bristol, and Admiral Keppel, one of North's strongest opponents, was defeated at Windsor. The contest in which Keppel was concerned afforded striking testimony to the Royal interest in a Government victory, for the sovereign himself went into a draper's shop and said in his peremptory way, “ The Queen wants a gown, wants a gown. No Keppel. No Keppel.”

Pitt naturally ranged himself with that section of the Opposition, now led by Shelburne, which had followed his father. A common hostility to the ministry also brought him into contact with one who was later to be his chief rival, Charles James Fox. The latter was just ten years older than Pitt, but, as he had been elected to the House



of Commons while still a minor, he was already an old Parliamentary hand. Like Disraeli and Gladstone in the following century, the two men were as opposed in character as in politics, and this fact enhanced the public interest in their rivalry. Fox was a gambler and a loose liver, but he possessed a personal charm to which even those of his contemporaries who most disagreed with him bear eloquent testimony. A Frenchman once expressed his surprise to Pitt that so moral a country as England prided herself on being, should be governed by a man of the private life of Fox, to which Pitt replied, "Ah ! You have not been under the wand of the magician." His upbringing had also been the reverse of Pitt's, for his father, Lord Holland, believed that a child should never be crossed, while at the age of fourteen the boy was taken to Spa and given five guineas a night to initiate him as a gamester. As a politician Fox allowed his tactics to ruin his strategy, a mistake Pitt never made : he could not resist the opportunity to turn the tables on an opponent in the House of Commons, however unfortunate the effect might be upon his own reputation in the country. Burke advised him in his early days in Parliament, "Lay your foundations deep in public opinion" ; but that was just what the impetuosity of Fox would never allow him to do. Pitt, on the other hand, always took this line, and that goes far to explain the success of the

one and the failure of the other. Pitt, too, looked to the country as Chatham had done, while Fox, for all his mob oratory, never allowed his gaze to wander through the windows of the House of Commons.

Another opponent of North in the new Parliament was Burke. He and Pitt were to be friends and enemies on many occasions before he died as a supporter of Pitt's administration in the struggle with revolutionary France. If Fox viewed every question from the point of view of expediency, Burke did so from that of principle, though it must be admitted that this did not prevent him from being remarkably inconsistent. It was in support of a motion of Burke for the better regulation of the King's Civil List, and for abolishing several sinecures, that Pitt made his maiden speech on February 26th, 1781. The line he took was that the King's control over his Civil List was that of a steward, not of a proprietor, and that what the nation had given it could also take away. This was sound Whig doctrine enough, but his attitude towards sinecures also foreshadowed the jealous custodian of the national finances: the opponents of the motion had ridiculed the small saving that would be effected, but Pitt held up to scorn those who refused to think in hundreds of thousands because at a moment of crisis the national expenditure was in terms of millions. Upon his contemporaries it

was the manner rather than the matter of his speech that made the greater impression, and few maiden efforts have been so universally applauded. Fox congratulated him in the most enthusiastic manner, and when an old member said he hoped to see the two young men sparring like their fathers before them, Pitt observed, "I have no doubt you hope to attain the age of Methuselah." "He is not a chip of the old block," said Burke, "he is the old block itself"; and it was realized that this youth of twenty-one was a power with whom the political world must henceforth reckon.

Co-operation with Fox in the House of Commons did not mean for Pitt participation in the high play and fast living of Brooks's, to which he was elected at this time. He and a number of friends, of whom perhaps the most notable was Wilberforce, formed a club of their own which used to meet on the premises of one Goostree, and there Pitt dined every night for some time. In this circle of his intimates he unbent to an extent unknown in his public life, and Wilberforce describes him as "remarkably cheerful and pleasant, full of wit and playfulness. . . . He was always ready to hear others as well as to talk himself." There was both gambling and drinking at Goostree's, but in moderation compared with what went on at Brooks's, and so Pitt, although a heavy drinker, never acquired that reputation

for debauchery which did Fox so much harm. He certainly drank far more than was good for his health, but, then, so did all his contemporaries. The pity was that his natural reserve prevented Pitt from showing to the world at large that sociability which he displayed to his intimates at Goostree's.

In spite of the eloquence and wit by which the Government was opposed in the House of Commons, it might have maintained its position indefinitely had it displayed ordinary competence in the conduct of the war against the United States. However, this was hardly to be expected from a ministry in which the man responsible for the campaign was Lord George Germain, whom a court-martial in the previous reign had found "unfit to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatever" for his behaviour at Minden : the Admiralty was under the Earl of Sandwich, an elderly lecher whose suitability for the post may be gauged by the fact that he had allowed the French fleet to cross the Atlantic without informing the British admiral in American waters of what was taking place. In the last week of November, 1781, the news arrived of the capitulation of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, and the Opposition redoubled its attack. Fox and Burke threatened the impeachment of Germain and Sandwich, while Pitt demanded a clear statement of the Government's policy in face

of this disaster, and declared himself in favour of an immediate termination of hostilities. During the course of one of his speeches North and Germain began to whisper together, while the notorious placeman, Welbore Ellis, bent down to listen : Pitt paused, and then observed, " I will wait until the unanimity is a little better restored. I will wait until the Nestor of the Treasury has reconciled the difference between the Agamemnon and the Achilles of the American War." For a few weeks the ministry, in spite of falling majorities, struggled on, but in the middle of March, 1782, North resigned.

The fall of the minister might well have been the death-blow to the King's ambitions, but once again George proved himself a master of political tactics. After many negotiations he succeeded in getting an administration formed of men with so little in common as Rockingham, Shelburne, and Fox. It was an astute move, for the differences within the Cabinet were so great that the King could play one member of it off against another. Pitt was offered a subordinate post in this ministry, but he refused it. A few days before North fell, he had said in the House of Commons, " For myself, I could not expect to form part of a new administration ; but, were my doing so within my reach, I would never accept a subordinate situation." Unlike so many young men, Pitt did not make the mistake of accepting the first offer

that came his way : he knew his worth, and he was content to bide his time.

As a private member he gave general support to the new ministry, but during its short life he devoted most of his energies to the advocacy of Parliamentary Reform. There was much to be said against a system in which Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and Birmingham were unrepresented, and Scotland had 45 members returned by only 4,000 voters, while 19 small Cornish boroughs returned 38 members. Out of the 513 members for England and Wales, 254 sat for constituencies which, taken together, numbered only 11,500 voters, and 56 boroughs had each less than 40 voters. It was estimated that 71 peers, together with the Lords of the Treasury, could absolutely nominate 90 members of the House of Commons, and could procure the return of 77 more ; that 91 commoners could nominate 82 members, and procure the return of 57 ; so that 162 people could, together with the Treasury, nominate 306 members, or a substantial majority of the House of Commons.

Pitt demanded reform on the grounds that "the representatives have ceased, in a great degree, to be connected with the people." He denied that he was an innovator, and declared that all he wished to do was to "put representation back on its original footing." Nevertheless, in spite of his arguments and his oratory Pitt was

beaten, when he divided the House on the question, by 161 votes to 141, after having been attacked by Burke "in a scream of passion." He was soon to have his energies diverted into other channels, for, after giving Home Rule to Ireland and abolishing some sinecures, the ministry broke up on the death of Rockingham at the beginning of July. Fox and his friends wanted the Duke of Portland as his successor, but the King would have none of him ; and so Shelburne became Prime Minister, with Pitt, aged twenty-three, as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The new Government was weak in Parliament, and it had to undertake the thankless task of making peace after an unsuccessful war. Shelburne was a man of considerable ability, but he had gained a reputation for double-dealing, by no means altogether justified, which made him generally mistrusted in political circles. None of the other members of the Cabinet was above the ordinary level except Pitt, and he had never held office before. Moreover, it was a minority administration, for if at any time the two wings of the Opposition, namely the followers of North and the official Whigs, acted together, ministers would be out-voted. This contingency, however, appeared remote, for the attacks of Fox upon North had been so violent that co-operation between them seemed impossible.

The Government's first duty was to make peace,

and this was rendered easier than would otherwise have been the case by the growing dissensions between the Americans on the one hand and their French and Spanish allies on the other. Accordingly, in November it was found possible to sign the preliminaries of peace with the United States, though these were not to come into effect until the general settlement with France and Spain. As to the terms upon which the latter should be made the ministers were sharply divided, and during November the Prime Minister only avoided the break-up of his Cabinet by not calling it together. Finally, after much wrangling, a provisional settlement was reached on the basis of the recognition of American independence, and a general restitution of conquests : indeed, on the balance the only important loss was the island of Tobago. In view of the character of the war which had taken place, such favourable terms reflected great credit on the diplomacy of the Government, handicapped as it was by the mistakes of its predecessors. France, after her defeats in the Seven Years' War, had been much more severely punished.

The Opposition was far from taking this view, and saw in the proposed peace merely an excellent stick with which to belabour the Government. Rumours began to circulate that Fox and North were forgetting old enmities in their desire to pull Shelburne down, and to seat themselves on



the Treasury Bench once more. Pitt heard these stories, and he realized that unless the ministry could be strengthened by reconstruction it was doomed, and the prospects of peace would be imperilled. With the knowledge and consent, but hardly with the approval, of the King and Shelburne, he had an interview with Fox. The latter asked whether Shelburne was to remain at the head of affairs, and, on being answered in the affirmative, said he could not serve under him. Whereupon Pitt broke off the conversation with the words, "I did not come here to betray Lord Shelburne." It was one of the few occasions when Fox was snubbed, and from that day the breach between the two men was to prove irreparable.

When Parliament met in February, 1783, it was clear that Fox and North were prepared to sink their differences and their principles for the sake of office. After some preliminary skirmishing a vote of censure was moved, and was supported by Fox with all his wonted vehemence and genius. It was one o'clock in the morning before Pitt rose to reply for the Government, and he spoke for three hours. He was not content merely to defend the peace proposals of the ministry, but vented his scorn upon the unnatural alliance by which the administration was threatened. He knew that it was in the highest degree improbable that any words of his could save the day, so he looked to the future, and addressed his remarks,

as Chatham had so often done before, to public opinion beyond the walls of the House of Commons :

“The triumphs of party, Sir . . . shall never seduce me to any inconsistency which the busiest suspicion shall presume to glance at. I will never engage in political enmities without a public cause. . . . These, Sir, the sober and durable triumphs of reason over the weak and profligate inconsistencies of party violence ; these, Sir, the steady triumphs of virtue over success itself, shall be mine, not only in my present situation but through every future condition of my life – triumphs which no length of time shall diminish, which no change of principle shall sully.”

At the same time he did not refrain from a scathing attack on his opponents :

“If this ill-omened marriage is not already solemnized, I know a just and lawful impediment, and, in the name of the public safety, I here forbid the banns.”

In his peroration Pitt once more reached the heights :

“You may take from me, Sir, the privileges and emoluments of place, but you cannot, and you shall not, take from me those habitual



was being forced upon him. When Shelburne resigned, George besought Pitt to succeed him, but the latter refused. He possessed, as Fox did not, that most necessary of qualities for a statesman, the power to wait. He knew his men, and he was sure that before long they would blunder so badly that the way would be left clear for him. The King had perforce to accept the inevitable, but he refused to confer any honours while the coalition was in office, a decision which had the effect of damping the enthusiasm of its supporters. As for Pitt, he was in the ideal position for a Parliamentarian of being in opposition to a divided and unpopular administration. Above all, he was laying his foundations deep in public opinion.

Public indignation was in no way diminished when it transpired that the new ministers were unable to secure any better terms of peace than the government they had overthrown. Pitt rallied them on their conduct, and also embarrassed them to no inconsiderable extent by introducing another motion for Parliamentary Reform. Fox had always supported this, and he was compelled to do so on the present occasion, whereas North voted against it, a fact which did nothing to promote harmony among ministers. Pitt was defeated by a majority of 144. During the summer and early autumn he adopted the policy of giving the Government enough rope to

hang itself, while he took a holiday. He went to Brighton for some bathing, then visited his mother at Burton Pynsent, and stayed with his friend Henry Banks at Kingston, near Swanage. After that he and Wilberforce went to France. They visited Reims, where they made the acquaintance of Talleyrand, and where Pitt complained he could not get any wine that was fit to drink. From there they went on to Paris, where Wilberforce tells us they thought Louis XVI a "clumsy strange figure in immense boots." Pitt met Franklin and Lafayette, and told the latter that his principles were too democratic for him. A marriage for him was even discussed with the daughter of Necker, the future Mme de Staël, whose mother had once stirred the heart of Gibbon. From such diversions he was recalled to London by the portents of a coming political crisis.

On November 18th, Fox introduced his India Bill, which was to take the government of India entirely out of the hands of the East India Company, while in future the latter was to confine its activities to commerce alone. There was much to be said for such a course, but the Bill provided for seven commissioners in London in whom all Indian patronage, amounting to about £300,000 a year, was to be vested ; and when the names of the seven were announced it was found that they were all violent partizans of the ministry. The

Bill "took the diadem off the King's head to place it on that of Mr. Fox." Pitt fought the measure in the House of Commons, but the prospect of unlimited graft weighed more with those who heard him than did his eloquence, and the Bill passed by a considerable majority. When it reached the Lords, the King authorized Earl Temple to say that those who voted for it would be considered his enemies, and fear of the Royal displeasure caused its rejection by 19 votes. On the next day the ministers were relieved of their seals, and on December 19th, Pitt, not yet twenty-five, became Prime Minister. His opponents laughed at the mince-pie administration, and Fox said it would be out by the second week in January. It lasted seventeen years.

## CHAPTER II

Struggle against Fox – financial policy – economic programme – India – weakness of position in 1785 – Parliamentary Reform – Pitt and the Commons – the Prince of Wales – the Regency Question – the slave trade – Warren Hastings – foreign affairs – private life.

THE new Prime Minister was in an extraordinarily difficult position from every point of view. He held office by favour of the King and of a small majority in the House of Lords, while in the Commons he was in a decided minority. This was bad enough on constitutional grounds, but for the son of Chatham to depend upon the support of George III seemed to his friends to be a personal disgrace. Fortunately for Pitt this was not the whole story, and he knew it, or he would never have consented to form an administration. He now reaped the benefit of his father's and his own cultivation of public opinion. The majority in the House of Commons might be opposed to him, but the country was with him, and though Fox fulminated against what he declared to be a government illegally clinging to power, yet he dared not press for a dissolution. Pitt was doing nothing unconstitutional so long as he did not unnecessarily delay an appeal to the electorate.

He proceeded with that circumspection which

he had taught his fellow-countrymen to expect when he refused office earlier in the year. His Cabinet was not inspiring, and he took the Chancellorship of the Exchequer himself, while he omitted Shelburne altogether. This laid him open to the charge of ingratitude, but Shelburne was so generally mistrusted that he was more of a liability than an asset in spite of his parts. In its final form the Cabinet consisted of six members, in addition to Pitt himself. The Marquess of Carmarthen, pleasant but unenterprising, went to the Foreign Office. Lord Sydney was Home Secretary, Lord Gower was President of the Council, and the Duke of Rutland was Lord Privy Seal. None of these was in the first class, but the presence of Lord Howe at the Admiralty was popular. Apart from the Prime Minister, the only really capable member of the Cabinet was the Lord Chancellor, Lord Thurlow, but his duplicity, bad temper, and dictatorial manner to no inconsiderable extent neutralized his undoubted abilities. Outside the Cabinet the most important personage was Henry Dundas, who held Scotland in the hollow of his hand. On the whole it was not an impressive team with which to face Fox, Burke, North, Windham, Tierney, and Sheridan; and its weakness in debating power threw an immense responsibility on the Prime Minister.

Hardly had Pitt taken office than two incidents



occurred which did much to enhance his popularity. At the beginning of January the Clerkship of the Pells, a sinecure worth £3,000 a year for life, fell vacant, and Pitt prevailed on Colonel Barré, a prominent Whig, to accept it in lieu of the annual pension of £3,200 which the Rockingham ministry had conferred on him. Pitt was a poor man, and contemporaries would have seen nothing wrong if he had taken the money for himself, but he preferred to save the country the amount of Barré's pension. In the next month his carriage was set upon outside Brooks's by a body of ruffians armed with sticks, and egged on by some of the members, who wished to incapacitate the Prime Minister for the rest of the session ; the doors were broken in ; and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Pitt escaped into White's. Fox was accused of planning the outrage, but he had an alibi : " I was in bed," he declared, " with Mrs. Armistead, who is ready to substantiate the fact on oath." In spite of what had happened, Pitt did not resign from Brooks's.

In the House of Commons the attacks of the Opposition were virulent to a degree unknown in these latter days, and it looked as if the intention was to make all government impossible. An India Bill brought in by the ministry was defeated on the second reading, and Fox charged the Prime Minister with unconstitutional conduct for remaining in office after that. Ten days

earlier Pitt had defined his attitude when he said, "The integrity of my own heart and the probity of the public, as well as my private, principles, shall always be my sources of action. I will never condescend to be the instrument of any secret advisers whatever; nor in any one instance, while I have the honour to act as Minister of the Crown in this House, will I be responsible for measures not my own, or at least in which my heart and judgment do not cordially acquiesce." He held his ground, and gradually the majorities against him began to diminish. In face of this Fox shrank from opposing the Mutiny Act, which must have precipitated a crisis of the first magnitude, and on a motion in March the ministry found itself in a minority of only one. Pitt realized that the time had come to strike, and on March 24th, 1784, Parliament was dissolved. The result more than justified his expectations, for no less than 160 of the supporters of Fox and North lost their seats - Fox's martyrs, as they were jokingly called. The Prime Minister himself was returned at the head of the poll for Cambridge University, for he had come to the conclusion that to sit any longer for a pocket borough was not consistent with his position.

At last Pitt was in power as well as in office, and was able to turn to the task which demanded attention above all others, namely that of national regeneration after a disastrous war. His

difficulties were not diminished by the fact that he was taking the helm at the commencement of a period of transition. The King had managed to break the hegemony of the Revolution families which had existed during the reigns of his grandfather and great-grandfather, but he had failed to put anything durable in its place. His own ministry, that headed by North, had proved to be one of the most funest in British history, and since its fall personal prejudice had become the keynote of politics at Westminster. Pitt had decisively defeated his opponents at the General Election, but he was far from having at his disposal the homogeneous party majority of a later age. Speeches still influenced votes in the House of Commons, and there were always the borough-owners to be considered. On the other hand, the rout of Fox and North had shown that the ordinary voter could on occasion be roused. The relative positions of the Crown, Parliament, and the electorate had once more become unsettled, and Pitt had to steer the Ship of State through a largely uncharted sea.

In social and economic life it was also an age of change. The old rural England was beginning to give ground before the advance of the Industrial Revolution. In 1779 Crompton had invented the spinning-machine known as the "mule," and Watt was already at work upon his plans for a steam-engine. The torpor which had fallen upon

the country with the accession of the House of Hanover was coming to an end. The movement initiated by Wesley was making rapid headway, and within the Church of England the Clapham Sect was paving the way for the evangelical revival. Not all the changes were for the good, and the enclosures were rapidly depriving the country of that yeoman class whose loss it was to feel so greatly in the years to come. Property was becoming concentrated in an ever smaller number of hands. Yet there was still little of that intense nationalism which was to be so prominent a feature of future generations, and as late as 1787 Colonel Byng, later the fifth Viscount Torrington, relates that on his travels he met an old sailor who had been wounded "in a war long ago, but with whom he knows not." The shame of the War of American Independence had caused England to stir uneasily in her sleep, but she did not really wake up until the storm of the French Revolution broke upon Europe. When she did rouse herself she was found to be looking, not back to the times of the Stuarts, but forward to those of Victoria.

Pitt was the child of this new age, and so was able to influence it. He was an aristocrat, but came of a family that had not had time to lose contact with public opinion. This was a relief to a generation which was weary of seeing its affairs the plaything of a few Whig magnates. His

personal life was above reproach both on moral and financial grounds, which was in marked contrast with the outlook of the gamesters and libertines who aspired, under Fox, to rule Great Britain from the Subscription Room at Brooks's. The British public is not unduly censorious of the morals of its rulers, but it insists upon a certain standard of outward behaviour, and Fox and his friends went too far. Pitt, indeed, raised the whole level of public life, which had fallen deplorably low at the time of his accession to the Premiership. His example restored to politics that dignity and disinterestedness which was to be associated with British statesmanship down to the end of the nineteenth century. It was no mean achievement in view of what had gone before, and it is not the least of his many claims to fame.

The first task that confronted the Government on the morrow of its victory at the polls was the restoration of the national finances, and as the Prime Minister was also Chancellor of the Exchequer this fell to his lot. The situation was deplorable, and the country was on the verge of bankruptcy. North had financed the war by means of loans, which had the effect of putting considerable sums into the pockets of the bankers, but from which the nation derived little benefit. His custom was to arrange the price of issue with a few friends in the City, and then to allot the scrip well below that figure to his political

supporters, who were thus able to sell at a handsome profit. Such being the case it is not surprising to learn that the National Debt amounted to £245,466,855, and if this figure should appear a mere trifle to the modern reader the latter would do well to bear in mind that it was only with the greatest difficulty the country could raise £25,000,000 in revenue. This debt had to no inconsiderable extent been incurred by North's attempt to keep money cheap, but the state of public credit by 1781 was such that the Government had to allot £150 of stock in the three per cents, and £25 in the four per cents, for every £100 actually borrowed. Thus, a loan of £12,000,000 cost the nation £21,000,000, and interest had to be paid on £9,000,000 which had never been received. Even the conclusion of peace made little difference, for the three per cents fell during 1783 from 65 to 56 : in January, 1784, they touched  $53\frac{7}{8}$ , but rose to a fraction over 58 when the results of the General Election became known.

Pitt got to grips with the financial problem when he brought in his Budget in June. In spite of all his efforts to balance income and expenditure, there was a deficit of £6,000,000, and to meet this he raised a loan. Since Consols stood at 58 he could only do this on exorbitant terms, but he threw open to public competition all tenders for it, and jobbery was avoided by having each

proposal officially opened at the Bank of England. As for the floating debt, which stood at £14,000,000, he was only able to fund £6,600,000 of it, and this he did by forming it into stock at five per cent, issued at 93. In this first Budget there was little scope, however, for originality, save in the matter of finding fresh sources of taxation such as race-horses, men's hats, ribbons, and gauzes. In the following year Pitt was able to complete the funding of the unfunded debt, but there was still a deficit, which was met by fresh taxation, this time on shops and female servants. By 1786 he had a surplus of £900,000, and he used it as the basis of the sinking fund which he now established. Once a quarter £250,000 was to be paid to six commissioners for the purchase of stock, the interest on which was to be invested in the same way. The fund thus created was to accumulate at compound interest, and so eventually extinguish the National Debt. In practice this scheme did reduce the National Debt by £10,000,000 by 1793, but when war came it meant that the Government, as income no longer balanced expenditure, had to borrow at a high rate of interest to pay off a debt contracted at a low one. Nevertheless, compound interest was one of the fetishes of the day, and the existence of the sinking fund created confidence in Pitt's finance by showing that the money raised by taxation was not being wasted.

With the exception of the institution of a sinking fund, it is true that there was nothing spectacular about Pitt's finance. His great achievement was that in 1784 the country's finances were in the most parlous condition, whereas, when war broke out nine years later, they were so flourishing that they enabled the country to weather the storm. Perhaps the best tribute to Pitt's work at the Exchequer is to compare it with that of those who were responsible for the finances of contemporary France. When Pitt became Prime Minister that Power had a debt roughly equal to the British, but she was both richer and more populous, she had just emerged from a successful war, and her prestige was higher than it had been for a century : six years later she was bankrupt, and in the throes of a revolution which was largely financial in its origin.

The restoration of the national finances was only made possible by an enlightened and progressive economic policy. Pitt was almost alone among British statesmen of that age in taking an interest in political economy, and there must have been few members of either House who had even a nodding acquaintance with the doctrines put forward a few years before by Adam Smith in the *Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. It is uncertain when the statesman first made the personal acquaintance of the economist, but there



is a pleasing story that on the occasion when Adam Smith was invited to meet Pitt at dinner he was late : the guests patiently waited for him, and when he did appear the Prime Minister said, " We will stand until you are seated, for we are all your scholars." There can be no doubt that since his Cambridge days Pitt had been deeply impressed by Adam Smith. If the latter did not originate, he certainly gave an enormous impetus to the reaction against State interference in trade and industry. Whether, in the long run, that reaction did not go too far, and inflict serious evils on future generations, is beside the point : freer trade and industry were needs of the moment, and Pitt cannot be blamed if, years after his death, Huskisson and Peel carried his policy to extremes. Furthermore, one of the problems to which he proposed to address himself was that of Ireland, and her grievances were really as much economic as political.

The existing system allowed England to shut out most Irish manufactured articles, while Ireland had to admit English goods either free or at a very low duty. Pitt proposed to establish free trade between the two countries, and as Ireland would be the chief gainer by this he suggested that she should contribute a fixed sum to the naval defence of the Empire. Some timid colleagues argued that it would gild the pill if a promise were given that the money would be spent on

ships stationed on the Irish coast, but Pitt negatived this in a letter to the Viceroy, the Duke of Rutland, with the words, "There can be but one navy for the Empire at large, and it must be administered by the executive in this country." In 1785 he brought his scheme before the House of Commons, and, after some modification, carried it in spite of the opposition of the vested interests affected. Fox assailed it, and declared, "I will not barter English commerce for Irish slavery." Unfortunately, these words provided the keynote for the discussion in Dublin, where the proposals were attacked as another injustice to Ireland, and finally they passed the Irish House of Commons by so slender a majority that the Government did not dare to proceed with them. Once again party politics had spoilt the prospects of a settlement between the two kingdoms, and Fox and his friends bear a very heavy responsibility indeed. As for Pitt, what had happened but served to convince him that there was no way out save the disappearance of the Irish Parliament altogether.

He was more successful in applying his economic principles to trade relations with France. The Treaty of Versailles in 1783 had provided that commissioners should be appointed to make commercial arrangements between the two countries, but nothing had actually been done because the Government realized that until its

position was more secure at home it would be folly to provoke the opposition which negotiations with France must necessarily arouse. In 1785, however, the French Government proceeded to restrict very drastically British imports, and Pitt was faced with the alternative of retaliation or negotiations : he chose the latter. William Eden, later Lord Auckland, who now rallied to the ministry, was sent on a special mission to Paris, and his efforts were crowned with success when a treaty was signed in September, 1786. By this agreement the duties were reduced on many of the principal articles of commerce of both countries, while others not specified were put on a most favoured nation footing. The subjects of either kingdom were to be free to enter the other without licence or passport, and were to enjoy complete religious liberty. The records of the negotiations prove that at every stage Pitt controlled them, and it is to him and to Eden, not to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carmarthen, that the credit must go. He even tried to get inserted a clause for the limitation of armaments, but the French would not consent.

The Government's success at the General Election encouraged it to embark once more upon the perilous sea of Indian reform. A new Bill established a Board of Control which was to exercise all the political power formerly enjoyed by the East India Company, but the latter was to

retain the patronage, except that the Governor-General and the presidents and members of councils were to be nominated by the Crown. In spite of considerable opposition this measure was passed, and two years later it was strengthened by an Amending Act which enabled the Governor-General to over-ride the opinions of his Council at Calcutta, the members of which henceforth had merely the right of minuting their protests. Burke declaimed against this "raw-head and bloody bones Bill," but it passed its third reading without a division. Thus was set up that system of dual control in India which lasted until 1858. It was not perfect, but it enabled the British Raj to survive the machinations of revolutionary and Napoleonic France, as well as such local foes as the Mahrattas and the Sikhs.

There was an even more involved problem in which Pitt took the keenest personal interest, and that was Parliamentary Reform. He had, as we have seen, already pressed this subject upon the attention of the House of Commons on more than one occasion, and he did not abandon it now he was in office and power. His advocacy of reform was no mere passing whim, or the result of a desire, when in opposition, to strike at the government of the day ; but was the consequence of a deep-seated conviction, which he only abandoned with regret when the progress of the French Revolution rendered it essential to concentrate

upon the conduct of the war. Unfortunately, circumstances were all against him when he brought forward his proposals on April 18th, 1785, for his hold over the House of Commons was at its weakest at that period. The reasons for this must be understood before judgment can be passed upon him for his failure to carry his scheme.

In the first place he had acquired considerable, if temporary, unpopularity by his Irish proposals, and the probability, which subsequently became a fact, that he might have to withdraw them lowered his prestige. In March of the same year he had been beaten on a measure to strengthen the defences of the chief national dockyards. In spite of the many claims upon his time Pitt devoted a great deal of attention to naval matters, and, as will be seen, the fact that he kept the country's first line of defence invincible enabled him to play a decisive part in international affairs during the crisis of 1786-88. By the time of the Spanish war-scare in 1790, there were no less than 93 line-of-battle ships ready for commission, which was in marked contrast with the position little more than ten years before, under Lord North, when the Franco-Spanish fleet had been mistress of the Channel. The House of Commons of those days was always ready to vote money for the Navy, but not a penny would it spend on the Army if it could be avoided. The Tories remembered Cromwell, and the Whigs could not forget

James II. Accordingly, when the Government asked for £700,000 for the fortification of Portsmouth and Plymouth they met with a cold reception. The leaders of the Opposition urged that such a step was but the beginning of a despotism which would deprive the country of its freedom. There was an all-night sitting, and when the division was taken at 7.0 a.m. the numbers were found to be equal, but the Speaker gave his casting vote against the Government.

A third cause of Pitt's weakness in the session of 1785 was his stubborn attitude towards the Westminster election enquiry. At the General Election in the previous year Fox, after unparalleled exertions, had won one of the two Westminster seats ; but when one of his defeated opponents demanded a scrutiny, the High Bailiff not only granted his request, but refused to make a return, which invalidated the election. Fox, however, found a seat elsewhere, and when Parliament met petitioned the House to order the High Bailiff to make a proper return. Pitt successfully opposed this, and the scrutiny proceeded, but very slowly, and without revealing any irregularities peculiar to the Whigs. Fox repeatedly moved his original resolution, and finally carried it. For the time being Pitt lost in reputation by his behaviour. The House of Commons abominates anything in the nature of victimization, and it was generally felt that the

Prime Minister's attitude was dictated by personal prejudice. It must be admitted that there was much in this view, though it is strange that the man who refrained from resigning from Brooks's when he had every justification should have shown himself so ungenerous a few months later. In part it was due to his isolation from his supporters in the House, but it was mostly due to the intolerance of youth. After all, he was only twenty-five.

It was thus in a hostile atmosphere that Pitt introduced his proposals for Parliamentary Reform, and he was clearly under some apprehension as to their reception, for his speech was lacking in that enthusiasm which he had previously displayed on similar occasions. Indeed, its very moderation, and the modest nature of the scheme which he outlined, defeated their own ends, for waverers were induced to feel that there could not be anything radically wrong with a system which called for so little amendment. Pitt began by declaring that he was advocating "a sober and practicable scheme which should have for its basis the original principle of representation," and he was careful to disclaim "vague and unlimited notions." All that he aimed at for the present was to disfranchise some 36 decayed boroughs, and to add their 72 members to the representation of the capital and the counties. He defended himself from the charge of innovation

by pointing out that in the past frequent changes had been made in the representation. The boroughs were to be disfranchised at their own request, which was to be obtained by the purchase of their franchise from a fund provided by the State. In future any borough which was, or became, so decayed as to fall below a standard fixed by Parliament was to be allowed to surrender its franchise for an adequate payment, and its right to return members would be transferred to populous towns. Pitt further proposed to give the vote to copyholders, and in the towns to householders. It was estimated that this scheme would cost £1,000,000, and would add some 99,000 voters to the register.

These proposals were coldly received. They did not go far enough for the reformers, and they went too far for the rest of the House. The return of prosperity, too, had caused the enthusiasm in the country for Parliamentary Reform to wane, and only eight petitions were presented in favour of Pitt's proposition, not one of which, significantly enough, came from Birmingham or Manchester. Fox, of course, opposed the Prime Minister as he never neglected an opportunity of doing, but for once he had a good case: he pointed out that the franchise was a trust, not a property, and that to offer to buy it was contrary to the spirit of the Constitution. Nevertheless, he voted for the scheme. Pitt could only reply that



it was a necessary evil if any reform was to take place, but leave to bring in the Bill was refused by 248 votes to 174. In 1786 Pitt gave his support to a proposal for reform brought forward by Lord Stanhope, but it was rejected by the House of Lords, and after that he took no further action. He has been criticized for so doing, but it is impossible to blame him. Parliament was clearly hostile to Parliamentary Reform, and the country was profoundly indifferent. To have persevered in these circumstances would have been to have risked the existence of his ministry, and with it the national revival which depended upon Pitt and his colleagues remaining in office.

The reverses which Pitt suffered throw an interesting light upon the House of Commons of those days. Even as late as 1788 his own personal supporters were said not to number more than 52, though there voted with them some 185 other members who could be relied upon to follow any minister who was favourably regarded by the King. Fox had about 150 votes in the House at his regular command, but the rest of the members were independent both of the Opposition and of the Government, though many of them had to take their orders from the borough-owners. The rigid party machinery of a later age did not exist, and ministers had to rely upon cajolery rather than threats to secure their majority.

Measures, too, which would now be brought forward by the Government were then sponsored by private members, and, even on such questions as Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation, members of the Cabinet agreed to differ. Pitt had thus to walk very warily : as Prime Minister he was in a weaker position than Gladstone or Disraeli in the following century, and in a far weaker one than Asquith or Baldwin in the one after, with whips and a caucus at their disposal. He had, in effect, to depend more on himself, and less on his office, to control the House. Such being the case, his defeats on the Westminster petition, the fortification of the naval bases, and Parliamentary Reform were neither meant nor interpreted as efforts to overthrow him ; they constituted a warning not to go too fast, and so he regarded them.

As time went on his position grew stronger, and something like a national party began to consolidate round him. His frigid manner in public was against its rapid formation, but the solid achievements of his administration gradually counteracted this personal disadvantage. Not that Pitt was always reserved, and with children he could throw off all his cares. On one occasion his niece, Lady Hester Stanhope, two of her young brothers, and William Napier (the future historian of the Peninsular War) got the Prime Minister down on the floor, and blackened his

face. At this moment two ministers were announced, and had to wait while their chief went to wash. When he received them the children were astonished at the change in his bearing : with his chin up and his usual lofty manner Pitt was once more the Prime Minister. He gave his decision to his visitors on the matter on which they had come to ask his advice, and the moment the door was closed behind them he continued the interrupted romp. It would have made his control of the House of Commons easier had he relaxed there occasionally, for the ordinary M.P. is not particularly interested in principles or measures, but he is soon drawn to a sympathetic personality. On the other hand, Pitt had the virtues of his failings, and his serenity in adversity was noted with admiration by contemporaries. He could bear to have his dearest project turned down without betraying any outward dejection. Perhaps if he had not been a proud and distant youth he would never have become "the Pilot that weathered the Storm."

Pitt had one problem to face which it was impossible to settle out of hand, and that was the differences within the Royal Family. Thanks very largely to the success of the Prime Minister the King had recovered the popularity which he had lost during the war of American Independence, and an attempt on his life in 1786 was the signal for demonstrations in all parts of the

country. The Prince of Wales, on the contrary, was behaving in a manner wholly detrimental to the interests of both the monarchy and the country. He was a liar, a drunkard, and a cad, and he made no effort to conceal his vices. In 1783, when he was only twenty-one, Parliament had voted him a considerable sum for the payment of his debts, but three years later his liabilities amounted to £269,000. There was an open quarrel between the King and the Prince, which thus perpetuated the Hanoverian tradition of personal enmity between the reigning monarch and his heir. In politics the Prince was closely associated with Fox, who had already placed him under what any other man would have considered a debt of gratitude by taking over his discarded mistress, the beautiful and complaisant Mary Robinson, better known as Perdita for her performance in *The Winter's Tale*. The Prince had enjoyed this lady's expensive favours since he was sixteen. In 1787 his financial position became desperate, and the Whigs promised to ask Parliament once more for money on his behalf. The position was complicated by the fact that the Prince had secretly married one of the successors of Perdita in his variable affections, namely Mrs. Fitzherbert, who had successfully stipulated for matrimony as the price of possession. This was a violation of the Royal Marriage Act of 1772 which required the King's previous consent, while

the Act of Settlement provided that marriage with a Roman Catholic, as Mrs. Fitzherbert was, constituted an incapacity to inherit the throne. If religion was no longer to be a bar to succession, the King of England was not George III in London, but Charles III, the erstwhile Bonnie Prince Charlie, in Florence. The problem was indeed intricate.

The Prince of Wales solved the question in a characteristic manner – with a lie. During the debate on the payment of his debts a member referred to the marriage as a danger to Church and State. Fox at once denied the authenticity of the report, and, when pressed for his evidence, said he spoke from “direct authority.” The following day Fox realized that he had been deceived, and for a time was extremely angry, though before long he and the Prince were as friendly as before. Nevertheless, the lie served its purpose, for it was generally believed. Pitt wished to avoid a scandal, and a reconciliation was effected between the King and the Prince. The latter received an addition to his income of £10,000 a year, while the House of Commons voted £161,000 for the payment of his debts, and £20,000 for the completion of Carlton House. The Prince was destined to be a liability to the country’s ministers to the day of his death, and this incident is but typical of the way in which he was an embarrassment. Pitt behaved in a

perfectly correct manner, though it is hard to imagine a more difficult position for a Prime Minister than to have his King and the heir to the throne on terms of personal enmity, while the latter is at the same time a public scandal and a tool of the Opposition. Pitt adopted the course best calculated to serve the interests of the monarchy and of the country, and when a comparison is attempted between him and British statesmen of other ages it should always be borne in mind that they were never subject to the handicap of "Prinny."

In November, 1788, there took place a crisis in which the Prime Minister and the Prince were again protagonists on opposite sides. The health of the King had not been good for some months, and he suddenly developed symptoms of insanity. While driving in Windsor Park he got out of his carriage and shook hands with the branch of an oak-tree, which he asserted to be the King of Prussia. The question of a regency at once arose, and as the Regent could be none other than the Prince of Wales, the hopes of the Whigs rose high. Fox hastily returned from Italy, and even the Lord Chancellor, Lord Thurlow, began to intrigue with the Opposition, which appeared likely so soon to be the Government. This event produced a curious situation, for Fox was forced to adopt a High Tory tone, and maintain that the Prince had a right to the regency, while Parliament was

only qualified to decide when he should exercise that right. As soon as Fox began to develop his argument along these lines, Pitt is said to have slapped his leg, and remarked to the minister sitting next to him, "I'll unwhig the gentleman for the rest of his life." In his reply, the Prime Minister drew a sharp distinction between an irresistible claim, which he admitted, and an inherent right, which he denied. Sheridan played still further into Pitt's hands by stressing the danger of provoking the Prince to assert his claim. Pitt was enabled to come forward as the champion of King, Parliament, and nation, and Parliament supported ministers in a measure which, in default of satisfactory precedents, laid down the conditions upon which the Prince was to be Regent.

The restrictions debarred him from conferring peerages, disposing of the King's property, or granting pensions except during pleasure, but if George had not recovered at the end of three years these conditions were to come to an end. It seemed as if the Government could not last much longer, and as the poverty of Pitt was notorious some of his sympathizers in the City offered him a gift of £100,000 in acknowledgment of his services, but he refused to accept it. At this point one of the King's doctors, Willis, held out hopes of his patient's recovery, and when the resolutions on the regency reached the House of

Lords the Lord Chancellor began to retrace his steps. He spoke movingly of the favours he had received from the King, and exclaimed, "When I forget them, may God forget me." This prompted Wilkes to an exquisite witticism, "Forget you ! He will see you damned first," while Pitt could not repress an "Oh, the rascal," with which he left the Upper House, where he had been listening to the debate. Before the Prince had actually assumed the regency, it was announced that the King had recovered, and the crisis came to an end. The result of it was to discredit Fox even further in public esteem, while Pitt's relations with his master were more cordial than before. At the same time, there was now always the danger that George might lose his senses again, and the Prime Minister had to be on his guard against any action which might have such an effect. This was to be a serious embarrassment in years to come.

There were, apart from international affairs, two other important subjects which occupied Pitt's attention during this peace period, and they were the Slave Trade and the trial of Warren Hastings.

It was the Prime Minister's old friend, Wilberforce, who first interested him in the unhappy lot of the slaves during the middle passages, that is to say from Africa to America, and an enquiry by the Privy Council was instituted. This produced



conflicting evidence as to the treatment of slaves in the New World itself, but left no illusions as to their ill-usage on board ship. Chained to each other, they were so closely packed on the lower decks and in the holds that they had scarcely room to move ; while, to keep them alive, they were exercised by being taken on deck from time to time and lashed to jump in their fetters. In 1788 Pitt supported a private member's Bill, which was subsequently passed, for regulating the transport of slaves in British ships, and said that if the trade could not be regulated he would vote for its abolition as " shocking to humanity, abominable to be carried on by any country, and which reflected the greatest dishonour on the British Senate and on the British nation." In the following year he gave his support to a motion of Wilberforce for the abolition of the Slave Trade, and voted in the same lobby as Fox and Burke ; but vested interests were too strong, and the question had to be shelved. Pitt never lost sight of his goal, though more pressing problems claimed his attention, and during his second administration he prohibited the importation of slaves into Guiana, which proved to be the beginning of the end.

The return of Warren Hastings from India in the spring of 1785 placed Pitt in a very difficult situation. The Governor-General was a man who had admittedly performed the greatest services while in office, but there were already rumours to

the effect that he had on more than one occasion gravely misused his position. Pitt had not felt justified in entrusting him with the extended powers which future Governors-General were to enjoy, so that if he received Warren Hastings too cordially on his return he laid himself open to a charge of illogical conduct, and of shielding a criminal : if, on the other hand, he showed sympathy with his critics he would be accused of slighting a great public servant. Pitt, therefore, marked time, until the following year, when Burke announced his intention of impeaching Hastings before the House of Lords. The Prime Minister insisted that a copy of the charges should be delivered to the accused, and that the latter should be heard in his own defence before a vote was taken on them. On June 1st, 1786, Burke moved the first charge, which related to the Rohilla war, where British troops had been hired out to a native potentate, and after debate it was rejected by 119 votes to 67. Two other charges were accepted by the House of Commons, and supported by Pitt. Accordingly, Warren Hastings was impeached, and his trial began in February, 1788. It ended seven years later with his acquittal on every count.

The attitude of Pitt had been sharply criticized, and he has been accused of sacrificing Hastings for reasons of Parliamentary tactics, but it is hard to believe the allegation. There is the authority

of Dundas, who publicly spoke of Hastings as "the saviour of India," for the fact that it was not until the eve of the debate that Pitt read the second charge, which was concerned with the treatment of the Rajah of Benares, together with the reply, and he then said he could not, on the evidence, vote against the motion. Months before he had stated that he was neither the friend nor foe of Hastings, but was "resolved to support the principles of justice and equity," and there is no reason to suppose that he deviated from this resolution. He kept an open mind, as an intelligent man was bound to do in the circumstances. Nevertheless, as Prime Minister, he would not have been human had he not viewed with complacency the energies of the Opposition being concentrated upon a side issue.

When Pitt took office Great Britain was without a friend in Europe. She had just emerged from a disastrous war, and it was universally believed that the days of her greatness were over. At first the Government was content to pursue a policy of inactivity, masterly or otherwise, in matters of foreign policy, for there were more pressing questions at home which demanded attention; but the Prime Minister was no believer in isolation, splendid or not, for he knew its dangers only too well. Although he was both Head of the Government and Chancellor of the Exchequer he took an active part in the work of the Foreign Office

so long as Lord Carmarthen was Secretary of State ; when war broke out with France he had naturally less time at his disposal for supervising departmental activities, and after 1791, the year in which Carmarthen was succeeded by Grenville, Pitt ceased to concern himself with details. In the earlier period, however, the Foreign Office memoranda bear frequent testimony to his labours, and it is clear that the foreign, like the domestic, policy of the administration was largely the emanation of a single brain.

How long Pitt would have pursued the line of letting sleeping dogs lie if left to himself it is impossible to say, but circumstances soon forced his hand. These circumstances were a threat to the independence of the Low Countries, which no British government has ever been able to regard unmoved. By the Peace of Utrecht and its subsidiary arrangements in 1713-14 Belgium had passed from the possession of Spain into that of the Emperor, though the Dutch were given the right to garrison certain Belgian towns along the French frontier. This anomalous situation was by no means palatable to the reigning Emperor, the reformer Joseph II, and he secured the withdrawal of the Dutch garrisons from the border fortresses. It was of no great importance to England who held the towns in question so long as they formed an effective obstacle to French aggression, but Joseph was the ally of France,

whose monarch, Louis XVI, had married his sister, Marie Antoinette. As if this were not enough, the Emperor now proposed to exchange his Belgian provinces for Bavaria, whose Electors had been French clients for generations. The danger, from the British standpoint, was still further intensified by the fact that in the United Provinces the party opposed to the House of Orange, always friendly to the British connection, was carrying everything before it, and was openly supported by all the resources of French diplomacy. The Stadholder, William V, was weak and irresolute, and it appeared to be merely a question of time before the whole of the Low Countries fell under the control of France.

Fortunately for Great Britain there was another country which viewed these developments askance, and that was Prussia. She had no desire to see such a consolidation of the Habsburg dominions as must have resulted from the exchange of Belgium for Bavaria. Frederick the Great, who had never forgiven England for what he deemed her desertion of him during the Seven Years' War, opportunely died in 1786, and his successor, Frederick William II, though a man of inferior character, was more personally concerned, for the Princess of Orange was his sister. In June, 1787, the latter was prevented by the rebels from going to The Hague, and Prussia demanded satisfaction for the insult. The opponents of the

Stadholder, who had by now suspended the latter from the exercise of his functions, refused to give way, and relied upon the support of France. Thereupon a Prussian army marched into the United Provinces, where it met with little opposition, and a British fleet appeared off the Dutch coast. For a moment peace hung in the balance, but before such a display of force France gave way, and abandoned the rebels to their fate. In 1788 the Triple Alliance of Great Britain, Prussia, and the United Provinces was formed for mutual defence and the maintenance of peace. Within five years of the Treaty of Versailles, and without firing a shot, Pitt had humbled France, and restored his own country to her proper place in the counsels of Europe. That he was able to do this was due to the fact that he had neglected no step to secure her predominance at sea.

The Triple Alliance was soon to exercise its influence elsewhere than in the Low Countries. Russia, then under the masterful rule of Catherine the Great, and the Emperor had become involved in war against the Turks, and during the course of it Sweden came to the Sultan's aid. The Swedes invaded Russian Finland, but were in their turn attacked by Denmark, the ally of Russia. The situation was serious, for the overthrow of Sweden would make the Baltic a Russian lake, with disastrous consequences to British and Dutch trade in that sea, while the coast of Prussia

would be exposed. Pressure was, therefore, at once brought to bear on the Danes, and Sweden was saved, but the Czarina was deeply offended, and rejected all the offers of the Triple Alliance to mediate between herself and the Sultan.

Circumstances soon arose which gave Catherine an opportunity to inflict upon Pitt one of the most serious reverses he had yet sustained during the course of his ministerial career. Unlike his father and nearly all his contemporaries, the Prime Minister regarded Russia with suspicion. The general attitude in Great Britain was to look on her as a useful counterweight to France, and to the latter's traditional allies, Sweden, Poland, and Turkey. Pitt did not take this view, and he was seriously alarmed at the progress of a Power whose appetite for Polish and Turkish provinces appeared insatiable : he rightly believed the Czarina to be determined upon the conquest of Constantinople, and he realized to the full the dangers which this would involve to British trade in the Mediterranean. During the course of their operations against the Turks the Russian troops had captured the town of Ochakov, near the mouth of the Bug, and the Triple Alliance adopted the line that this place must be returned to the Sultan. Apart from his natural suspicion of Russian intentions, Pitt advanced this demand for two reasons : he had been led to believe that Ochakov was the key to Constantinople, and he desired to please the

Russophobe feelings of Prussia, to whom he had recently been compelled to point out that Great Britain would not permit the Triple Alliance to be used as an instrument for the aggrandizement of that country in Central Europe at the expense of Austria and Poland.

Catherine refused to give way, and was encouraged in this attitude by Fox, who departed so far from customary diplomatic procedure as to send to St. Petersburg a representative of the Opposition in the person of Sir Robert Adair. An ultimatum was sent to the Czarina, and war appeared imminent, when, in April, 1791, Pitt was forced to give way. More than one of his colleagues opposed his policy, which was also unpopular in the City and in the country as a whole. At this time, too, it began to be realized that Ochakov did not possess the strategical importance with which it had been invested. The ultimatum was accordingly never delivered, and the Russians retained their conquest. To the Government the shock was considerable, and there was talk of its resignation. Pitt had once more gone too far ahead of public opinion. He managed, however, to weather the storm, though it cost him his Foreign Secretary. The Duke of Leeds, as Lord Carmarthen had become, resigned, and Lord Grenville was appointed in his place. In a few months the whole affair was forgotten as the progress of the French Revolution absorbed the



attention of the whole population of Great Britain.

Disraeli once wrote of Pitt's career to Sir William Harcourt, "It is the first half of it which I select as his title-deed to be looked upon as a Tory minister – hostility to borough-mongering, economy, French alliance, and commercial treaties, borrowed from the admirable negotiations of Utrecht." It is impossible not to share this estimate, for the mere mention of the reforms effected or attempted by Pitt before war diverted his energies into different channels is in itself an eloquent tribute to his greatness. In addition to those which have been discussed at length, there were such enlightened measures as the abolition of public executions at Tyburn, the substitution of transportation of convicts to Australia for slavery in the tropics, and the admission of Roman Catholics to the Army and the Bar. It was Pitt, too, who gave a measure of autonomy to Canada and thus proved that he had learnt the lesson of the War of American Independence. What is also noteworthy is that his policy was all of a piece, and he did not sponsor legislation in one sphere which would defeat his ends in another.

Those who criticize Pitt for not having achieved more during the first eight or nine years of his Premiership forget the difficulties of his position. It is beside the point to compare him with the so-called benevolent despots who were his contemporaries. They could bring about any reforms

they wished by a mere stroke of the pen, while he was dependent upon a majority that was by no means docile. The reverses which he sustained in the matter of Ireland, of Parliamentary Reform, of the fortification of the ports, and of his Russian policy were a sufficient warning of his fate if he attempted to go too fast. It is arguable that for his reputation this was not a bad thing. The reforms of a Joseph II unsettled more than they settled, and they did not outlive the reformer. Pitt, on the contrary, was forced to proceed slowly, and his reforms took root. In some respects he wrought even better than he knew, for he removed most of the real grievances, at any rate in England, before the hurricane of the French Revolution began to blow, and so reduced to a handful the number of those who really wanted to see Britain go the way of France. The plight of the former in 1783 was infinitely worse than that of her neighbour, and but for the prudent administration of Pitt it is more than likely that eight years later Great Britain would have followed the example of France. Indeed, with her Parliament the sport of factions, with her finances in chaos, and with a discontented population, there would have been no alternative. From all this she was saved by the statesmanship of Pitt.

The Prime Minister's private life during these eight years was uneventful. He was not the man to make friends easily, and for the most part he

continued to associate with those whom he had always known. Wimbledon, where Wilberforce lived, had a special attraction for him, and in August, 1784, he took the lease of a house on the north side of Putney Heath. In the following year he purchased Holwood Hill, near Bromley, in Kent, "a most beautiful spot, wanting nothing but a house fit to live in," as he described it to Wilberforce. The purchase of this property placed a considerable strain upon his financial resources, for he was careless in money matters, and was imposed upon by his servants. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt but that these years were the happiest of his life.

## CHAPTER III

The French Revolution – Pitt's attitude – adhesion of the Portland Whigs – the British Jacobins – duel with Tierney – wartime finance – conduct of the war – peace negotiations – the Second Coalition – the union with Ireland – Catholic emancipation – resignation.

THE events which took place in France in the summer of 1789 marked the turning-point of Pitt's career. The great apostle of peace, retrenchment, and reform was slowly compelled to give place to the war minister, and in this latter capacity he had to turn his back upon more than one of those ideals for which he had battled during the earlier years of his public life. Chatham's son was called upon to play his father's part in circumstances of far greater difficulty than Chatham had ever known. In the Seven Years' War the father had the greatest soldier of his day, Frederick the Great, for an ally, and a France at the nadir of her fortunes for an enemy. Forty years later the son had one of the greatest soldiers not only of his day, but of all time, for an adversary, and as allies but the weak and vacillating Cabinets of Vienna, Berlin, and Madrid. In the circumstances the surprising thing is that Pitt managed to hold his own, while his foresight is attested by the fact that while Napoleon was at the height of his power he

outlined the conditions upon which peace was ultimately made nearly a decade later. There is no basis for a comparison between Chatham and Pitt save in the iron resolution of both to weather the storm.

Continental movements are always slow in impressing their importance upon the British public, which invariably finds it difficult to think of more than one thing at a time. When the French Revolution came Pitt proved himself to be typical of the mass of his fellow-countrymen. With Fox it was very different. When he heard of the fall of the Bastille he wrote, "How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! and how much the best!" To that standpoint he adhered during what were to prove the darkest days of his career. Upon Pitt the storm made no such immediate impression. So far as Europe was concerned his gaze was still directed further East, and a General Election in 1790 increased his majority, so that he appeared to have no reason for disquiet at home. In every way his position seemed to be stronger than ever. Even so late as 1792 he was optimistic, for in introducing his Budget that year, he said, "Unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country, when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace than at the present moment." This was his last peace Budget, and the skill with

which he had managed the national finances is shown by a surplus of £600,000 on a total revenue of £16,212,000. Three per cent Consols, which had been at 54 when he took office, stood at 97. Within twelve months they were little over 70, and Great Britain was at war with France.

It is not easy for the biographer of Pitt during this latter part of his first administration to dissociate his career from the national history. He received little help from his colleagues in the Cabinet, and he was often compelled to interfere in what should have been purely departmental matters. In England as well as in France his motives have been questioned both by contemporaries and by posterity. He has been represented as one who was at best only a faint-hearted monarchist, because he did not see the struggle against the French Revolution in the light of a monarchical crusade ; but there is no evidence that his views on the subject of monarchy had changed since he criticized Lafayette for being too much of a democrat. Nor can the estimate of Pitt as the lukewarm supporter of thrones be brought into harmony with the description of him as the paymaster of coalesced tyrants, for he was always ready to make peace on any reasonable terms. Both interpretations are equally far from the truth. He looked at the progress of events in France from the point of view of a British statesman, and to the very last he hoped that it would

not be necessary for him to interfere. To blame him for not appreciating the situation from the beginning is beside the point, for it was impossible to foresee that Louis XVI would be as weak as he proved. Pitt proceeded cautiously, with his eyes firmly fixed on the interests of his own country, and those who would condemn his behaviour as lacking in inspiration would do well to ask themselves what other line he could have taken, seeing that the phenomenon he was called upon to face was absolutely new.

Furthermore, Pitt was no autocrat, and British public opinion would not have supported any drastic action in the early days of the French Revolution. It had a healthy distrust, which the Prime Minister shared, of the motives of Austria and Prussia, and for some months it fondly hoped that France was merely curtailing the power of the Crown in the way in which England herself had done a century before. The change of feeling did not really begin to make itself felt until November, 1790, when Burke published his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, and even then it is permissible to suppose that at first Burke made a greater impression outside political circles than at Westminster. Indeed, his judgment as a rule was so ill-balanced that his insight into the progress of the revolutionary movement in France is the more remarkable, and it was this insight that brought to him in his declining years, though at

the expense of a breach with Fox, that fame which has ever since been associated with his name. Pitt certainly was not carried away by the arguments of the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, for as late as September, 1791, Burke wrote to his son, after dining with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, "They are certainly right as to their general inclinations, perfectly so, I have not a shadow of doubt ; but at the same time they are cold and dead as to any attempt whatsoever to give them effect."

Before the storm burst, Pitt was able to gain a diplomatic victory over Spain in consequence of what was happening in Paris. A dispute had arisen over the seizure by the Viceroy of Mexico of some British ships at Nootka Sound, in Vancouver, and both sides began to prepare for war. The Spanish Government thereupon called on France to fulfil her obligations under the Family Compact, but the National Assembly, after grandiloquently declaring that the French nation had renounced wars of conquest, proceeded to offer assistance on terms which included the restitution of Louisiana. In this dilemma the Spanish ministry preferred to treat with Great Britain, and a settlement was effected on the basis of a declaration that Nootka was a free port, and of compensation for damage done.

From the moment that Pitt delivered his singularly optimistic Budget speech in February,



1792, events began to move at an accelerated pace. France was represented in London by the *ci-devant* Marquis de Chauvelin, a vain young man, who did nothing to improve his already difficult position by maintaining close relations with those who were working for an upheaval of the French type in England. As adviser to the French Embassy there was Pitt's old acquaintance at Reims, Talleyrand, but his desire to improve his country's relations with England was thwarted by the jealousy of his official superior, as well as by the rapid changes of policy in Paris. The Prime Minister continued to hope that peace might be preserved, and carefully avoided any action calculated to antagonize France. In this attitude he was supported by Grenville and Dundas, while the King, Thurlow, and Camden were definitely Gallophobe. In Paris the situation was going from bad to worse, and anarchy was the order of the day. Pitt still adhered to his policy of neutrality, and when Lord Gower, the British ambassador, asked permission to make representations to the French Assembly on behalf of the King and Queen it was refused. On August 10th the Tuileries were stormed, and Royalty in France was suspended. This led to the recall of Gower, but only because the monarch to whom he was accredited was no longer reigning. Before he left, he expressed the desire of Great Britain to remain neutral, but he warned the

French Government that any violence to the Royal Family "could not fail to produce one universal sentiment of indignation throughout every country of Europe." Pitt may be accused of culpable inactivity during these critical months, but he cannot be charged with forcing the pace.

In September there occurred the massacres of the Royalist prisoners, and the defeat of the Prussians at Valmy. French armies over-ran Belgium, and in January, 1793, British public opinion was horrified by the execution of Louis XVI. There was general mourning, in which all classes shared. It was clear that the fate of Belgium would soon be that of Holland, and only a few years had elapsed since Great Britain had intervened to protect that country from France. The threat was infinitely more dangerous now that the French Republic was offering the support of its arms to all who were dissatisfied with their rulers. British remonstrances were brushed aside, and on February 1st, 1793, the Convention declared war. The Low Countries, for which England has so often had to fight, were thus the immediate cause of hostilities, and Pitt was only stating the truth when he said, "The war is not only unavoidable, but, under the circumstances of the case, absolutely necessary to the existence of Great Britain and Europe."

Enough has been said to show that Pitt did not,

as is still sometimes alleged, deliberately precipitate the struggle with France. Had such been the case he would at least have been ready for it ; yet in the Budget of 1792 he asked for no more than 17,013 men for home service, and for the ensuing six months he reduced even that scanty force to 13,701. On the same occasion he allowed for the discharge of 2,000 sailors. These are not the actions of a man spoiling for a fight. The French occupation of Belgium, and the threat to Holland, not the bellicose attitude of Pitt, were what brought about hostilities, not forgetting such manifestoes as that of the French minister who wrote, " We will make a descent in the island. We will lodge there 50,000 caps of Liberty. We will plant there the sacred tree, and we will stretch out our arms to our republican brethren. The tyranny of their Government will soon be destroyed." The temper of official France may be gauged from the fact that this document was published a month before the declaration of war.

The breach with France had a profound effect upon the alignment of parties in Great Britain, and it was not long before the Government began to benefit. Ever since the days of the coalition between Fox and North many of the older Whigs who still nominally supported the former had felt increasingly more uncomfortable, and there was little in Pitt's programme to which they could object on the score of principle. Even before war

broke out Burke had vindicated the consistency of his own position in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, and neither his example nor his arguments were without influence upon those who had been associated with him. A few weeks later an illustrious, if youthful, recruit joined the Government ranks in the person of George Canning. In his Oxford days he had been a strong Whig, but the progress of events in France had profoundly disturbed him, and on August 15th, 1792, he had his first interview with Pitt in Downing Street. The result redounds to the credit of both men, for the Prime Minister, who was by no means naturally prone to make new friendships, seems to have taken an immediate liking to Canning, a liking that was heightened by the latter's independence when the question of a seat came to be discussed. The upshot of the interview is best described by Canning himself: "The seat (i.e. Newtown, Isle of Wight) does not cost me one farthing nor put me under the smallest obligation to any one man, woman, or child, Mr. Pitt only excepted." Within a month of entering the House of Commons he wrote, "Pitt and I are upon very comfortable terms. I go to him when I like, and ask questions and get notions and take advice, and he does not seem bored." The magnetic effect which Pitt exercised over so proud a nature as that of Canning cannot be ignored in any estimate of the former's character.

In July, 1794, the logical consequence of the transformation in the political situation was seen when the Whigs who followed the Duke of Portland accepted office in Pitt's administration. There were other changes in the Cabinet about the same time. Thurlow had, a year before, given place to the more pleasant, if equally disloyal, Loughborough, while a few months later Pitt found himself under the disagreeable necessity of removing his own elder brother from the Admiralty, where his incompetence had been palpable. The admission of Portland and his colleagues to the Government completed, if in very different circumstances, that break-up of the Whigs for which George III had worked so hard since the beginning of his reign, and it stabilized politics for a generation. The old Whigs became the new Tories, for the word revolution had nothing to recommend it now it connoted, not the bloodless triumph of vested interests over the old popular monarchy of the Stuarts, but the Reign of Terror in Jacobin Paris. The old issue which had divided the country since 1714, namely the dynastic problem, had been dead since the Elibank Plot in 1752-53, but the efforts of George III to increase the power of the Crown had prevented this fact from having its due influence upon the state of parties. Now the fog lifted, and the two bodies of opinion were sharply revealed.

All this undoubtedly strengthened Pitt's position,

but it was at the sacrifice of his ideals. There was no place for reform in a world which had no alternative but the *status quo* and revolution. The stampede towards the Prime Minister of panic-stricken Whigs meant the end of the policy that had been pursued for the previous ten years, and a generation was to elapse before it was resumed under very different auspices. Those who criticize Pitt for abandoning his previous ideals are inclined to forget the circumstances in which he was placed. Revolution was a new thing at the end of the eighteenth century, and there were no precedents upon which to form an estimate how far it might spread. In all the lands bordering upon France the disease had proved remarkably catching, and Pitt knew better than anyone else how much inflammable material was lying about in his own country. Even if he had determined not to doff the garb of the reformer it is doubtful if he would have obtained any support worth the name in the House of Commons. When, in 1801, he did make a stand on behalf of the principles he had held since childhood he was forced to resign, and if he had so acted on any previous occasion after the French declaration of war the same fate would have overtaken him. While he lived there was no one adequately to replace him (the Addington administration proved that), and such being the case it is impossible to resist the conclusion that his duty to his country

was to remain at the head of affairs, even if it meant the abandonment of his dearest convictions.

As for the British Jacobins, they had only themselves to blame for the undeniably hard treatment which Pitt meted out to them. What they lacked in numbers, they made up in clamour. The revolutionary movement in Great Britain found its gospel in Paine's *Rights of Man*, and its machinery in the various Corresponding Societies and Radical Clubs which sprang up in various parts of the kingdom. Many of these were harmless enough, if republican in sympathy, but some embarked upon a course of conduct which no administration could ignore. There was a plot to seize Edinburgh Castle, and the most violent resolutions were passed expressing sympathy with the progress of events in France. The temper of the Opposition Press may be gauged from the fact that when the King went in state to St. Paul's in December, 1797, to return thanks for the victories of Cape St. Vincent and Camperdown, the *Morning Post*, then the leading Whig organ, announced the event in the following words: "The consequence of the procession to St. Paul's was that one man returned thanks to Almighty God, and one woman was kicked to death." The operation of the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended; a Treasonable Practices Act and a Seditious Meetings Act were passed; the Press was regulated and taxed; and a number of

agitators were prosecuted, only, however, often to be acquitted by the juries concerned. In Scotland, it must be confessed, there were cases of real injustice, but that was due, partly to the greater severity of the Scottish law, and partly to the presence on the Bench of MacQueen of Braxfield, Stevenson's Weir of Hermiston, whose typical address to a jury was thus parodied in the *Morning Post* :

*I am bound by the law, while I sit in this place,  
To say in plain terms what I think of this case.  
My opinion is this, and you're bound to pursue it,  
The defendants are guilty, and I'll make them rue it.*

Historians of an earlier age devoted much attention to the rights and wrongs of Pitt's attitude towards the British sympathizers with the French Revolution. Judged by recent standards his administration was moderate in the extreme, and, not to go further afield than Great Britain, those who can recall the Defence of the Realm Act are not likely to censure Pitt's methods over much. It must be remembered, too, that there was then no police worth the name, while the troops, billeted for the most part in public-houses, were peculiarly susceptible to seditious propaganda. Above all, the Prime Minister had seen how, on more than one occasion on the other side of the Channel, a little firmness would have prevented revolution. All he did was to over-estimate the



number of his fellow-countrymen who really wanted to see the streets run with blood (as opposed to those who merely talked about it), and that is a mistake which has been made by British statesmen both before and since his day. It is also well to remember that when, more than a generation later, the Whigs, led by those who so vehemently attacked Pitt for his harshness, were in power, and the wretched labourers of the Western counties burnt a few ricks to call attention to the fact that they were starving, the Government hanged seven, imprisoned four hundred, and transported four hundred and fifty-seven. As Mr. Christopher Hobhouse, the gifted biographer of Fox, so well puts it, "Surely when those poor victims got to Heaven, Pitt was released from Purgatory without a stain upon his name."

Differences of opinion on the subject of France brought Pitt once more into violent personal antagonism with Fox. At a banquet in May, 1798, the latter proposed the toast of "Our Sovereign, the Majesty of the People," and there was talk of a reprimand at the Bar of the House. Pitt, never very generous where his rival was concerned, hoped Fox would repeat there the offence, so that he could be sent to the Tower for the rest of the session. In the end all that happened was the removal of his name from the list of members of the Privy Council. More serious in its possible consequences was a passage of arms in the

House of Commons between the Prime Minister and another Whig, George Tierney, which resulted in the latter sending Pitt a challenge to fight. The duel took place with pistols on the afternoon of Whitsunday, May 27th, 1798, in a dell on Putney Heath, near where the old Portsmouth Road dips into Kingston Vale. Both men fired twice, but neither was hit, and honour was satisfied. The affair, however, provoked widespread censure, not least because it took place on a Sunday. As Tierney was twice the bulk of his antagonist, the wits said that in all fairness Pitt's figure should have been chalked out on Tierney's, and that no shot taking effect outside ought to count.

The enormous strain imposed upon him by the war did not cause Pitt to resign the Chancellorship of the Exchequer. If he had been lucky in time of peace his fortune deserted him now. The harvest of 1792 was seriously defective, and there was much want. In the following year there were 1,926 failures, of which twenty-six were failures of country banks. It was an inauspicious start to the war, and the situation was not improved by the Prime Minister's incorrigible optimism. "It will be a short war," he said, "and certainly ended in one or two campaigns." No one knew better than he the critical state of French finance, and he could not believe that a nation would be able to fight for long with its financial system in

chaos. With this outlook it is not surprising that he should have preferred loans to an increase of taxation ; and so firmly did he adhere to this policy that the Funded Debt, which in 1792 was roughly £238,000,000, had risen to £574,000,000 by 1801. On the other hand, owing to the difficulty of raising money at a higher rate than the customary 3 per cent the country only received £223,000,000 of the £336,000,000 it had borrowed. The inconvenience of the attempt to keep money cheap at all costs was seen in 1793, when every £100 borrowed created £138 stock. It was North's methods over again, but without the corruption. In 1797 the Three Per Cents fell to 47, and the sacrifice became enormous.

In spite of what future generations were to condemn as unsound finance (that is to say until another great contest rendered Pitt's critics less inclined to dogmatize), the vitality of the nation was unbounded, and the balance of trade continued to be favourable. In 1796 the Government took the then unusual course of appealing direct to the public to meet a prospective deficit occasioned by the continually increasing demands for the public services. A "Loyalty Loan" of £18,000,000 was issued, bearing interest at  $5\frac{5}{8}$  per cent, and was subscribed within a few hours, so great was the confidence in the administration. Even so, Pitt remained a moderate, and in his Budget speech he warned his hearers, "this

flourishing state of our affairs ought not to lessen our moderation, or abate our desire for peace." Yet, such are the tricks that fate plays in time of crisis, in the very next year there was one of the greatest financial panics the country has ever known, and an emergency meeting of the Privy Council issued an order empowering the Directors of the Bank of England to refuse payments in cash until Parliament gave further orders on the subject. They were not resumed until 1819. One further innovation remained, the Income Tax. In the last weeks of 1797 Pitt brought forward his proposals : incomes under £60 were exempt, those between £60 and £65 paid at the rate of 2*d.* in the pound, and the proportion rose until it reached 2*s.* in the pound for incomes of £200 and more. The outcry was tremendous, and the ruin of the country was freely predicted ; but Pitt held his ground, although he was hooted in the City, and his carriage on one occasion at least had to be guarded by a squadron of horse. Parliament voted the taxes, and within a year the critics were confounded, for the trade returns in 1798 were distinctly better than those in 1797. There was also a "Patriotic Contribution," which brought in no less a sum than £2,300,000 in voluntary donations. The Prime Minister was thus surely justified in his claim in December, 1798, when he said, "A common feeling of danger has produced a common spirit of exertion, and we

have cheerfully come forward with a surrender of part of our property, not merely for recovering ourselves, but for the general recovery of mankind." Further taxation, it is true, soon proved necessary, but the corner had been turned, and confidence in British credit was restored.

The military and naval details of the struggle which began in 1793 belong rather to the history of England than to the biography of Pitt, though as Prime Minister, he was, of course, technically responsible for all that occurred. In actual fact there was considerable difference of opinion between the King and himself as to the objects of the war, and more than one of his colleagues sided with the monarch. This difference naturally affected the conduct of operations. To Pitt the end to be attained was security, and from this standpoint he never departed. England could not be safe while France was in possession of the Low Countries. He had been prepared to fight to prevent this in 1787-88, and he would fight now to drive the French out. The King, on the contrary, regarded the war as a monarchist crusade to restore the Bourbons to the throne of France, and Burke agreed with him. Pitt realized the futility of attempting a restoration by force, and he was justified by events: when Louis XVIII finally returned in 1814 he was brought back, not by the Allies, but by Talleyrand. Nevertheless, he never wavered in the belief that

in the monarchy alone lay the hope of France and the security of Europe, as is shown by a letter which he wrote to Grenville in October, 1793 :

“I do not see that we can go on secure grounds if we treat with any separate districts or bodies of men who stop short of some declaration in favour of monarchy : nor do I see any way so likely to unite considerable numbers in one vigorous effort as by specifying monarchy as the only system in the re-establishment of which we are disposed to concur. This idea by no means precludes us from treating with any other form of regular Government, if, in the end, any other should be solidly established ; but it holds out monarchy as the only one from which we expect any good, and in favour of which we are disposed to enter into concert.”

The Bourbons were best both for France and Europe, but the French must be induced to restore them themselves. Pitt had assimilated the lesson of Valmy.

These divergences of opinion resulted in a dissipation of British strength. Official England has always favoured expeditions with a limited and local objective, and the present occasion was no exception, but the situation was complicated by the attitude of ministers. Were, for example, the

French Royalists in Toulon and La Vendée to be supported as part of a monarchist crusade, or as a diversion to distract the attention of Paris while the main blow was struck elsewhere? Pitt himself wished to seize any advantage that offered, partly to offset the loss which the country was suffering, and partly to have something with which to bargain when the time came to talk of peace. Those who regarded the war as a crusade could not be expected to agree with a point of view which to them was unchivalrous in the extreme. The result was a compromise, and it led Great Britain to disaster after disaster until the ambition of Napoleon became so obvious that the national spirit was roused as never before. There must, however, also be taken into account that both in quality and quantity the British army was at its nadir. Between Marlborough and Wellington there is little that is glorious in the country's military annals, at any rate in Europe ; and so it is hardly surprising that the efforts of the Government should have been almost uniformly unsuccessful.

The progress of hostilities was, indeed, consistently unfavourable to Great Britain, and to the Austrian, Prussian, and Spanish allies whom she financed. It proved impossible to keep the French out of the Low Countries, and Toulon had to be abandoned. The French succeeded in establishing themselves in Belgium and Holland, and on

the whole of the left bank of the Rhine, as well as in portions of Spain and of Piedmont. As a compensation, however, there was Lord Howe's victory at sea on June 1st, 1794, which freed England from any immediate fear of invasion. Meanwhile, the Reign of Terror was taking place in France, and in four weeks in the summer of 1794 no less than fourteen hundred people were sent to the guillotine in Paris alone upon one pretext or another. This régime of butchery, however, came to an end with the execution of Robespierre himself, and in October of the same year the Directory was installed in office. One of its first acts was to appoint Napoleon to the command of the French Army in Italy. Nevertheless, Pitt felt that some form of stable government had been established, and he determined to make overtures for peace.

The situation in the summer of 1796 was that Napoleon was over-running Italy, and as a result of his victories the British Government was compelled to abandon the Mediterranean altogether. Great Britain had in that sea no possessions of her own with the exception of Gibraltar, and so was deprived of any safe naval base ; while all her allies, save Austria, had made their peace with France. In July the Prime Minister decided to make an effort to bring the war to an end, and Lord Malmesbury was sent to Paris to negotiate for a settlement on the basis of the evacuation of



the Low Countries by the French. Unfortunately, in the middle of the negotiations Catherine II, who was distinctly Gallophobe, died, and her successor, Paul, adopted a policy of neutrality. This news emboldened the French to refuse Pitt's terms, and Malmesbury was unceremoniously bundled out of Paris at twenty-four hours' notice. This was not an auspicious beginning, and it strengthened the hands of those who did not wish to come to terms with France at all.

The following year was, with the exception of the naval victory off Cape St. Vincent, one of unrelieved gloom. Mention has already been made of the financial crisis, but the military situation was equally deplorable. The closing weeks of 1796 had witnessed Napoleon's defeat of the Austrians at Arcola, and a French attempt to invade Ireland under the leadership of Hoche. In January, 1797, came another French victory over the Austrians, this time at Rivoli ; while by April the Emperor was so far reduced that he was compelled to sign the preliminaries of peace at Leoben, and one of the most onerous terms was the cession of Belgium. At home the Government, as well as being compelled to authorize the suspension of cash payments, had to deal with serious naval mutinies at Spithead and the Nore. In spite of these disasters Pitt made up his mind to approach France again, and negotiations were resumed in June, 1797 : on this occasion they

took place at Lille, with Malmesbury as the chief British delegate. Canning had been appointed Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs the year before, and he played a prominent part in the negotiations which now took place.

Pitt's situation was one of peculiar difficulty. The failure of the previous year's negotiations had prejudiced the King against their renewal, and several members of the Cabinet, including Grenville, shared the Sovereign's opinion. Such being the case Canning was called upon to act as an intermediary between the Prime Minister and Malmesbury, for the Foreign Secretary was by no means always informed of what was taking place. In effect, Malmesbury wrote three types of reports ; those that were for Pitt, those that were for Pitt and Grenville, and those that could safely be communicated to the whole Cabinet. For all these despatches the young Under-Secretary of twenty-seven served as the clearing-house. Canning warmly supported the Prime Minister in this resumption of negotiations, for he still believed that the policy to be pursued towards France was a question of expediency rather than of principle.

Malmesbury's instructions were a mirror of the French successes of the previous six months, for he was empowered to recognize the sovereignty of France over Belgium, Luxembourg, Savoy, and Nice, and to promise that Great Britain would

restore all her conquests save Trinidad and the Cape of Good Hope, while Ceylon was to be exchanged if possible. These terms were, from the French point of view, a marked advance upon those suggested in the previous year, but they formed the only possible basis for an understanding between the two countries in view of Napoleon's victories in Italy. Moreover, in France itself there appeared a distinct possibility of a Bourbon restoration, and it was believed that the adoption of a conciliatory attitude would encourage the moderates in Paris. These hopes were soon disappointed. In September came Napoleon's *coup d'état* of the 18th Fructidor, and the aspirations of the French Royalists were frustrated for another seventeen years. The influence of events in Paris was soon felt at Lille, and Malmesbury was informed that the French Government would only treat on the basis of a restitution by Great Britain of all conquests made by her from France and her allies. This was too much even for Pitt and Canning, and Malmesbury was recalled to London. On October 17th the Treaty of Campo Formio, between France and the Emperor, was signed, and the isolation of Great Britain was for the moment complete.

The failure of this fresh attempt to make peace strengthened Pitt's position enormously, for it made clear to the nation that France would be satisfied with nothing less than the hegemony of

Europe and the humiliation of Great Britain. Two days after the signature of the Treaty of Campo Formio the Dutch fleet was destroyed by Admiral Duncan at Camperdown, and the shame of the naval mutinies was forgotten. A national revival began of which Pitt became the idol, and his domestic enemies fared very badly indeed. Fox was lucky when he could muster forty votes on a division. In November the *Anti-Jacobin* made its first appearance, and Canning lashed with his biting wit the opponents of the Prime Minister. In the same month Fox and some of his supporters began to absent themselves from the House of Commons, notably when the thanks of Parliament were voted to Duncan for his victory. Such tactics have never been successful in British history, and their only result was to identify Fox in the eyes of the public still further with the French cause. Much water had flowed under the bridges since the ordinary sentimental Englishman had been inclined to rejoice when he heard of the storming of the Bastille, and the day was not far distant when the "Corsican ogre" became the nightmare of the Southern counties.

Without allies Great Britain was forced to fight by sea, and very well she did it, for 1798 saw Nelson's victory of the Nile. This, combined with Napoleon's absence in Egypt, inspired the Czar to suggest another attempt against France, in

conjunction with Austria. Pitt agreed, and both Vienna and St. Petersburg received ample subsidies. Nevertheless, the Second Coalition achieved no more than the first had done, partly owing to the hard fighting of the French, and partly owing to its internal dissensions. Meanwhile, Napoleon had made himself master of France, and his first act was to propose terms to Austria and Britain. Pitt would have none of them, and he referred to the First Consul as "this last adventurer in the lottery of revolutions." When he was challenged by Tierney to state the object of the war in one sentence without *ifs* and *buts*, he retorted in a manner that made a profound impression on the House :

" . . . I know not whether I can do it in one sentence, but in one word I can tell him that it is security ; security against a danger the greatest that ever threatened the world ; . . . against a danger which has been resisted by all the nations of Europe, and resisted by none with so much success as by this nation, because by none has it been resisted so uniformly and with so much energy. . . . How or where did the honourable gentleman discover that the Jacobinism of Robespierre, of Barrère, of the Triumvirate, of the Five Directors, which he acknowledged to be real, has vanished and disappeared because it has all been centred and condensed

into one man, who was reared and nursed in its bosom, whose celebrity was gained under its auspices, who was at once the child and champion of all its atrocities and horrors? Our security in negotiation is to be this Buonaparte, who is now the sole organ of all that was formerly dangerous and pestiferous in the Revolution. . . . *If* peace afford no prospect of security; *if* it threaten all the evils which we have been struggling to avert; *if* the prosecution of the war afford the prospect of attaining complete security; and *if* it may be prosecuted with increasing commerce, with increasing means, and with increasing prosperity, except what may result from the visitations of the seasons then I say it is prudent in us not to negotiate at the present moment. These are my *buts* and my *ifs*. This is my plea, and on no other do I wish to be tried by God and my country."

Pitt has been severely criticized for rejecting the First Consul's offer, and there can be little doubt that he did so because he believed neither in the stability nor the sincerity of Napoleon. He proved to be as wrong on the first point as he was right on the second.

The year 1798 witnessed a rebellion in Ireland and a French invasion of that kingdom. Fortunately the two events did not coincide, for the

rebels were routed at Vinegar Hill two months before General Humbert landed at Killala, but they proved that the Irish problem could not be neglected any longer. The grant of Home Rule in 1782 left Ireland connected with Great Britain only by the unity of the executive in both countries. The Irish Parliament might have expressed disapproval of a war or an alliance made by Great Britain, and might have refused supplies ; it might have imposed excessive duties on English goods, might have declined a commercial compact with Great Britain, and actually did so in 1785 ; it might have taken a different course from the British Parliament on a Constitutional problem. The tie between London and Dublin was perilously weak, and Pitt realized that in time of stress it might give way altogether. Union was the only remedy, as it had proved in the case of Scotland at the beginning of the century, and so far as he was concerned he was no recent convert to the idea. As long ago as 1792 he had written to the then Lord Lieutenant :

“ The idea of the present fermentation gradually bringing both parties to think of an Union with this country has long been in my mind. I hardly dare flatter myself with the hope of its taking place ; but I believe it, tho’ itself not easy to be accomplished, to be the only solution for other and greater difficulties. The admission  
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of Catholics to a share of suffrage could not then be dangerous. The Protestant interest, in point of power, property and Church Establishment, would be secure because the decided majority of the supreme Legislature would necessarily be Protestant ; and the great ground of argument on the part of the Catholics would be done away, as, compared with the rest of the Empire, they would become a minority. You will judge when and to whom this idea can be confided. It must certainly require great delicacy and management ; but I am heartily glad that it is at least in your thoughts.”

The problem of the future government of Ireland was inextricably bound up with that of Catholic Emancipation. The laws against Roman Catholics, which still prevented them from taking any part in the public life of the country, dated from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the religious question was the most important issue of the day. More recently, a spirit of greater toleration had begun to make its appearance, but it was a long while before Catholics commenced to benefit by it. Almost to a man they were Jacobites, and the Whigs not unnaturally failed to see the necessity of going out of their way to ameliorate the lot of those who were plotting their destruction. With the decay of Jacobitism this argument ceased to operate,



but it was soon to be apparent that old prejudices die hard. So late as 1767 a priest was condemned to imprisonment for life, and was actually incarcerated for four years, for exercising his office. Eleven years later an Act was passed which enabled Catholics who abjured the temporal jurisdiction of the Pope to purchase and inherit land, and freed priests from liability to imprisonment. Even this relief, however, was not effected without occasioning the Gordon Riots. In 1791 a further step was taken. Though still precluded from sitting in Parliament and holding public offices, Catholics were given complete freedom of worship and education, admission to the legal profession, and exemption from vexatious liabilities, provided that they took an oath of an unobjectionable character. Pitt approved of this measure, which was a private Member's Bill, and Fox supported it, though the latter expressed the wish that it had gone further, and declared his dislike of all tests.

In 1793 the Irish Catholics were admitted to the franchise. The first breach had been made in the ramparts of Protestant ascendancy, and it was a mere question of time when it would be widened. Yet, if Catholics were allowed to sit in the Irish Parliament they would dominate it by sheer weight of numbers, and there would be civil war, probably accompanied by a French invasion. Pitt saw that the only way out lay in an

Imperial Parliament, when Catholics could be placed on the same footing as the rest of the King's subjects, and the most nervous Protestants could sleep safely in their beds. In this way, too, Ireland would enjoy those economic advantages which he had been unable to secure for her in 1785.

The story of the Union belongs rather to the life of Lord Castlereagh, the Chief Secretary, who carried it through, than to that of Pitt, who originated it, but during the course of the debates the latter showed very clearly what was in his mind :

“ On the other hand, without anticipating the discussion, or the propriety of agitating the question, or saying how soon or how late it may be fit to discuss it, two propositions are indisputable ; first, when the conduct of the Catholics shall be such as to make it safe for the Government to admit them to the participation of the privileges granted to those of the established religion, and when the temper of the times shall be favourable to such a measure – when these events take place, it is obvious that such a question may be agitated in an United Imperial Parliament with much greater safety, than it could be in a separate Legislature. In the second place, I think it certain that, even for whatever period it may be thought necessary after the Union to withhold from the Catholics

the enjoyment of those advantages, many of the objections which at present arise out of their situation would be removed, if the Protestant Legislature were no longer separate and local, but general and Imperial : and the Catholics themselves would at once feel a mitigation of the most goading and irritating of their present causes of complaint.”

It has been stated that Pitt, in order to carry the Union, corrupted the virgin innocence of the Irish Parliament. One might as well talk of a negro becoming sunburnt by the English sun as of the Legislature of Ireland being corrupted by Pitt. All he did was to apply on a more extensive scale the immemorial methods of obtaining a majority. He was also more successful than many of his predecessors ; and on August 1st, 1800, the Union received the King's assent. The way was now clear for the second part of Pitt's programme, namely Catholic Emancipation.

In September a meeting of the Cabinet was called to consider the question, but Pitt said nothing to the King of his intentions. This was probably a mistake, but the Prime Minister doubtless acted in the belief that if he could first of all persuade his colleagues to agree upon a definite line of policy it would be easier to bring the Sovereign round to his way of thinking. Unfortunately, when the notices of the meeting of the

Cabinet were sent out, Lord Loughborough, the Lord Chancellor, was in attendance on the King at Weymouth, and he could not resist the temptation to ingratiate himself with his master, even at the expense of his loyalty to his colleagues. Accordingly, he showed the Prime Minister's letter to George, and the anti-Catholic opposition to Pitt's proposals began to gain ground. For the moment Pitt did not press the matter, but he brought it up again in January, 1801, when he found that not only Lord Loughborough, but the Duke of Portland and Lords Westmorland and Liverpool as well were against him. By this time, too, the views of the King were generally known, and at a *levée* he said for all to hear, "I shall reckon any man my personal enemy who proposes any such measure. The most Jacobinical thing I ever heard of."

In these circumstances it was clear that the crisis could not long be delayed. At the King's request Addington, the Speaker, sounded Pitt as to his intentions, and in reply the latter sent the Sovereign a statement of his views, which were, briefly, that he proposed the substitution of a political oath for the existing sacramental test, and also some provision for the Roman Catholic clergy. He added that if the King withheld his consent he would feel himself compelled to resign. George replied to the effect that he was bound by his coronation oath to refuse, and suggested that

the matter should not be mentioned again : to this Pitt declined to agree, and placed his resignation in the King's hands. There then occurred an interlude which is capable of various constructions. George accepted Pitt's resignation, and at first wished to retain the existing ministers with Addington at their head. Several members of Pitt's Cabinet, however, as well as Canning, refused to serve under Addington, and it became clear that a new ministry, on a definitely anti-Catholic basis, would have to be constituted. At this point in the proceedings the King went out of his mind, and there was a further delay of about three weeks until he recovered his sanity. As soon as he was better he proceeded to lay the blame for his illness upon Pitt, who thereupon took the rather extraordinary course, in view of his previous attitude, of sending an assurance to the monarch through his doctor that he would not raise the subject of Catholic Emancipation again during the King's lifetime.

Different explanations have been given of this somewhat inexplicable action of Pitt, but the most probable is that he desired at all costs to avoid driving the monarch permanently out of his senses. If the Regency of the Prince of Wales and the Premiership of Fox would have been dangerous in 1789, they would have been nothing short of a disaster in 1801, when the figure of Napoleon was beginning to cast its shadow over

all Europe. In any event Pitt drew no personal advantage from the line he had taken. There now appeared to be no valid reason why he should be replaced by Addington at all, and Canning, who put Pitt's retention of office before Catholic Emancipation, used all his power to induce him to change his mind. It was in vain. Addington had received his appointment, and showed no disposition to relinquish it ; while Pitt, as Canning complained, would not make any "forward movement towards the King," though he promised to give Addington his support. On March 14th, 1801, he finally resigned after having been in office continuously for over seventeen years. It is some satisfaction to note that the Judas of the crisis, the Lord Chancellor, was not retained in the new administration. When he died four years later the King observed, "He has not left a greater knave behind him in my dominions." When this was repeated to Thurlow, himself no mean judge of such matters, he remarked, "Then I presume that His Majesty is quite sane at present."

There can be little doubt but that there was also another motive behind Pitt's behaviour, and that was the conviction that the time had come to make another effort to secure peace with France. He felt that he personally was too unpopular with the French, and too disliked by the First Consul, to initiate negotiations with any

hope of success. However this may be, he resigned office, as he had accepted it, from the loftiest motives ; and, unlike many another Prime Minister, he left Whitehall to face relative poverty.

Already in October, 1800, bailiffs had been threatening to seize his furniture in Downing Street for debts of £600 and £400, although his official salary was in the neighbourhood of £6,000 a year, and as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports he had another £3,000. The man who managed the country's finances so well was quite incapable of regulating his own, and when he resigned office he was insolvent. Holwood had to be sold, and a number of his friends came to his assistance. Even so, his income was far below that of those with whom he associated, but the fact was wholly to his credit, for his opportunities of making money had been unlimited. A few years earlier Pitt's impecuniosity had stood in the way of his marriage with Eleanor Eden, the daughter of Lord Auckland. Here, again, it was his scrupulous sense of honour that directed his conduct, for, deeply as he appears to have been in love with Miss Eden, he would not ask her to become the wife of a man who could not support her properly. The result was to drive him in upon himself still further, whereas a happy marriage might well have brought out in him those qualities in which he was generally considered to be lacking. In that

event his life might well have been prolonged to its normal span, with incalculable benefit to Great Britain and the world.

What Pitt would not do for himself, namely amass wealth, he was prepared to effect for his friends, and Canning is a case in point. The latter's marriage with Miss Joan Scott is believed to have brought him a fortune of not less than £100,000, and Pitt's attitude can be seen from a letter written by Hookham Frere at the time : " He (i.e. Pitt) regarded the marriage as the one thing needed to give Canning the position necessary to lead a party, and this was the cause of his anxiety. . . . Had Canning been Pitt's own son, I do not think that he could have been more interested in all that related to his marriage." Canning was married in July, 1800, and Pitt was one of the witnesses at the ceremony.



## CHAPTER IV

Pitt and Addington – the Treaty of Amiens – life in retirement – renewal of the war – defence of Kent – second administration – Pitt's difficulties – the Melville Case – the Third Coalition – last illness and death – Pitt's place in history.

WHEN the Addington administration took office, it is said that an elderly Tory peer was heard to express his satisfaction at the advent of a ministry which contained "none of those confounded men of genius." That such was the case was in no way due to Pitt, who had urged his late ministers to serve under the new Premier, and who had sorely tried some of them, notably Canning, by his insistence. He himself gave the Government all the support he could, though it was not easy to remain on cordial terms with Addington when Canning was attacking the latter with a vehemence rarely equalled, and never surpassed, in the history of the country. The Irishman, too, had the happy knack of expressing public opinion in a telling phrase, and his famous lines :

*Pitt is to Addington,  
As London is to Paddington,*

were hardly calculated, as they were certainly not intended, to further good relations between Pitt and his successor in office. The comparison

between the abilities of the two men was so striking that it was inevitably extended to their respective administrations. When a proposal was made to defend the Thames estuary by means of block-houses, Canning wrote :

*If blocks can the nation deliver,  
Two places are safe from the French ;  
The first is the mouth of the river,  
The second the Treasury Bench.*

Indeed, it was obvious from the beginning that with Pitt still in public life the Addington administration could not hope for a prolonged tenure of office.

For a time the pressure of events abroad postponed the inevitable crisis. The struggle between Great Britain and France had reached stalemate, with the former as powerful at sea as the latter was on land. In these circumstances a breathing-space was necessary, and so, after some negotiations, the Preliminaries of London were concluded in October, 1801, to become the Treaty of Amiens in March of the following year. Great Britain agreed to restore to France, Spain, and the Batavian Republic all their possessions recently conquered by her, with the exception of Trinidad and Ceylon. She also evacuated Elba and Malta, the latter to be restored to the Knights of St. John. On their part, the French returned Egypt to the Sultan,

while withdrawing from Naples and the Papal States. Nothing, however, was said about the resumption of trade between England and France, and no assurances were given as to the independence of the republics on the French frontiers. It is true that Napoleon had promised the Emperor to respect it, but Great Britain had no definite grounds for complaint if he broke his word. Grenville and Canning considered these terms disgraceful, but Pitt supported the ministry from the beginning. He had taken, after his retirement, a small house in Park Place, and from there he is found writing to a friend describing the Preliminaries as not all that he could have wished, but "highly creditable, and on the whole very advantageous." He took the same line in the House of Commons, and his attitude very largely contributed to the ease with which the Government carried the day.

As the months went by it became increasingly more clear that any arrangement with Napoleon must be nothing more than a truce, and those who had from the beginning mistrusted the Addington administration grew seriously alarmed. Safety was to be found only in the return of Pitt to office, and his friends determined to do what they could to force his hand. They carried in the House of Commons a vote of thanks to him for his services with only fifty-two dissentients, and on May 28th, 1802, Canning organized a banquet at the

Merchant Taylors' Hall in commemoration of his birthday. Neither Addington nor Pitt was present, but the occasion was made memorable by the recital of Canning's latest poem, "The Pilot that weathered the Storm." The last stanza is by far the best :

*And O ! if again the rude whirlwind should rise,  
The dawning of peace should fresh darkness deform,  
The regrets of the good and the fears of the wise  
Shall turn to the pilot that weathered the storm.*

So far as these efforts were intended to detach Pitt from Addington they were in vain, for at the General Election in the summer the Government won a sweeping victory very largely owing to the support of the ex-Prime Minister. Pitt was himself returned once more by Cambridge University, "with every mark of zeal and cordiality," as he wrote ; while it was a notable commentary upon his Irish policy that no single member who had voted for the Union lost his seat.

As soon as peace was made Pitt took up his residence at Walmer, for he was still Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. His appearances at Westminster became rarer ; when the Duchess of Gordon met him one day at a *levée*, and asked whether he still talked as much nonsense, he laughingly replied, "I do not know whether I talk so much nonsense : certainly I do not hear so much." Previous to his retirement the only

relaxation which he had found time to enjoy had been an odd day's hunting from Holwood with one of the Kent packs, and in these circumstances it was only natural that there should be a reaction. Lady Hester Stanhope visited him in September, and found her uncle a prey to that lassitude which so often follows a long period of exertion. The summer, too, had been an exceptionally hot one, and Pitt was suffering from suppressed gout. He was also becoming anxious about the international situation, and a visit from Addington, who was staying at Eastbourne, in July had done little to reassure him. Indeed, there is Tomline's authority for the statement that Pitt described the Prime Minister as "without exception the vainest man he had ever met with," and as "a man of little mind, of consummate vanity and of very slender abilities." The thought that such a one was at the head of affairs was not likely to contribute to Pitt's peace of mind. Yet when Canning came to Walmer in the early autumn Pitt said he had promised to support Addington, and from this pledge only the latter could release him. Canning thereupon besought him to ask for release, but Pitt said that would savour too much of an intrigue to return to power, and added, "My ambition is character, not office."

The insistence of Canning, both now and at the time of Pitt's resignation, caused a temporary coldness between the two friends, and a few

months earlier the former had gone so far as to tell Frere, "I consider my intercourse with Pitt as closed for ever." It was probably this estrangement that led the ex-Premier to cultivate Spencer Perceval, who had entered Parliament as a young barrister a few years before. He was totally devoid of the brilliance of Canning, but he was a hard worker, and had no inconsiderable grasp of finance. Indeed, one contemporary avers that on being asked who should be his successor Pitt named Perceval without hesitation. Castlereagh was another rising statesman upon whose judgment Pitt placed increasing reliance, and it was his policy that the former adopted when the map of Europe had to be re-drawn in 1814-15. Yet, for all that, it was Canning who was to prove Pitt's political heir.

Pitt did not allow either politics or his indifferent health to occupy all his attention, and he settled down to farm seriously. The most urgent need of the country was more corn, and he determined to set an example by leasing a large farm near Walmer. Such was his intention unless, as he put it, "the pacificator of Europe takes it into his head to send an army from the opposite coast to revenge himself for some newspaper paragraph." At the end of October he went to take the waters at Bath, and on his way there he visited Sir Charles Middleton to gain some further agricultural information. The cure at Bath did

Pitt good, and he spent Christmas in the New Forest ; but hardly were the holidays over than Addington asked him to come to the neighbourhood of London for a conference. The new ministry had blundered badly in the matter of finance, and was faced with a deficit. Pitt complied with the Prime Minister's request, but the subsequent conversations had no practical result. The weaker Addington found his position becoming, the less he felt disposed to invoke the support of Pitt, and Canning's gibes were goading this vain man into that state of obstinacy which is always produced in the pompous by such circumstances. The Prime Minister and his predecessor were still in the main agreed on matters of foreign policy, but the commencement of the year 1803 found them beginning to draw apart where other questions, notably finance, were concerned.

How long it would have taken for these disagreements, in the normal course of events, to have developed into a definite breach it is impossible to say, for Napoleon soon precipitated a crisis. In the autumn of 1802 he annexed the Duchy of Parma, and the continental possessions of the King of Sardinia. He sent troops into Switzerland to occupy the chief passes of the Alps, and he ordered the Cisalpine and Batavian Republics to put crushing duties on British goods. This was bad enough, but worse was to follow.

He requested Addington to expel those members of the French Royal Family who had taken up their residence in Great Britain, and asked for the suppression of certain newspapers which had criticized his methods of government. These demands were of course refused, and the First Consul then raised the subject of Malta. The Knights of St. John were not yet ready to return there, but Napoleon insisted that the British troops should nevertheless be withdrawn at once. When this was refused, and the annexation of Piedmont and Parma was raised by the British Ambassador, Lord Whitworth, there was a public scene at the Tuileries : Napoleon stormed and raged at the ambassador for all to hear, and declared that although he had no desire to fight, if he once drew the sword it should never be sheathed until England was crushed.

The obvious determination of the First Consul to resort once more to arms compelled Addington to devise some means of strengthening his ministry, and the only way to do that was by the inclusion of Pitt, or so it seemed to the Prime Minister and his colleagues. To the vast majority of the English people the obvious course was for the Government to resign, and for Pitt to be entrusted with the formation of a new administration, but Addington was too full of his own importance to take so public-spirited a line save in the last resort. He therefore sent Lord Melville,



as Dundas had now become, to Pitt with the suggestion that the latter should be Chancellor of the Exchequer in a ministry headed by his brother, the Earl of Chatham. Melville duly went to Walmer, but he had hardly broached the subject before he realized that the proposition was not palatable. As for Pitt, he told Wilberforce later, "Really, I had not the curiosity to ask what I was to be." Quite rightly, considering his position and his services, he demanded the Premiership, if he was to return to office, and he refused to desert those members of his former administration, notably Grenville and Windham, who had resigned with him. Addington would not consent, and so the negotiations broke down, to the disgrace of the Prime Minister. The national needs were forgotten, and personal intrigues were allowed to carry the day, while the master of Europe was beginning to assemble the "Army of England" at Boulogne.

War was declared on May 18th, 1803, and five days later the rupture with France was debated in the House of Commons. Pitt spoke from the third row behind the Treasury Bench, and, as Canning wittily put it, he fired over the heads of the ministers. He neither praised nor blamed them, but denounced the aggressions of the First Consul. Contemporaries described the speech as one of the finest he had ever made. However that may be, it created such an impression that

in spite of all the eloquence of Fox, and the feeblest of replies by Addington, the Government carried the day by 298 votes to 67. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister resented the absence of definite praise in the speech of Pitt, and so the latter returned to Walmer to direct the defence of the Kentish coast against Napoleon.

It was at this time that, with some misgiving, Pitt offered a home to his niece, Lady Hester Stanhope, who was then twenty-seven. She had fled from the vagaries of her father, "Citizen" Stanhope, at Chevening to old Lady Chatham at Burton Pynsent, but the latter had just died, and she was homeless. Historians have not dealt too kindly with Lady Hester, and her extravagant behaviour in the last days of her life has given colour to the belief that she was always more than a little mad. It is certainly tempting to argue back from the moody mistress of the lonely Syrian fortress, with its thirty servants and equal number of cats, to the girl who arrived at Walmer in the spring of 1803, but it is decidedly dangerous. Lady Hester seems rather to have brought into her uncle's life a much-needed brightness, and it is clear that in spite of her eccentricities her influence was for good. She was, it is true, ridiculed by the great Whig ladies of the day, for Society was still Whig, but that did not worry the granddaughter of Chatham. Indeed, what she did shows how much Miss Eden might have done had

not Pitt's pride stood in the way of his marriage. One incident in her stay at Walmer will suffice to describe her. She had a great admiration for Sir John Moore, and when a General Phipps tried to disparage Moore to Pitt, she turned on him : " You imagine, General, that Mr. Pitt does not greatly value Sir John's abilities, but learn from me, you nasty kangaroo (alluding to Phipps' paralytic infirmity and method of holding his hands), that there is no one in the King's army whose services he appreciates more highly." Stratford Canning, who is our authority for the story, says Pitt exclaimed at this, " Lady Hester ! Lady Hester ! What are you saying ? " but " with an ill-suppressed smile which betrayed his secret enjoyment of the scene."

If the Government did not want Pitt in London there was plenty of work for him to do in Kent. As Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle he had to organize resistance along the whole coast from Ramsgate to Rye, that is to say in those very districts where the French were most likely to land. There were some antiquated works at Sandown, Deal, and Walmer ; there was Dover Castle ; and a redoubt or two further West, but that was all. On the other side of the Channel were 115,000 of the finest troops in Europe, under the command of the greatest soldier of the day. Pitt threw himself into the work with an energy

reminiscent of his father. The threat of invasion had called into existence the Volunteer Movement, and there was no lack of enthusiasm. Pitt spent money that he certainly could not afford, but he set an example that was contagious. He spent hours in the saddle, and he never went up to London except when the wind was such that it would be impossible for the French to put out from Boulogne. By November, 1803, he felt justified in expressing his confidence that, with the aid of the Regulars at Hythe commanded by Sir John Moore, his Volunteers would be able to repel any force that attempted to land in East Kent.

These months of activity wrought a great change in Pitt. The lassitude which had marked the period immediately after his retirement disappeared, and in January, 1804, Lady Hester was able to write of her uncle, "His most intimate friends say they do not remember him so well since the year '97." Nor was the influence of the life he was living purely physical. Daily contact with all sorts and conditions of men was a new experience for him, and he found it decidedly bracing. Indeed, in these last years of his life he came more to resemble Chatham than his own former self. He had always uttered his appeal to the country as a whole, but now he made for the first time the personal acquaintance of that British people which he had never forgotten, but

which he had only known in the abstract. As he rode up and down the coast of Kent he realized of what his fellow-countrymen were capable, and that to avert the French peril they would not shrink from making efforts on the same national scale as their enemy had done. Unlike the *quidnuncs* and politicians in London they were not thinking in terms of "ins" and "outs," but of winning the war. To them all other issues were a minor consideration, and they were quite ready to sink personal differences for a common end. Pitt found such an atmosphere very congenial to him, and his response to it was reflected in his good health and spirits.

Meanwhile, there were all the signs of an impending political crisis. It was not so much that the Government had made any serious mistakes, except where finance was concerned, as that it was patently incompetent. Grenville took the lead in the efforts to overthrow Addington, and when Pitt still hesitated he came to an understanding with Fox. At this point the King's mind became unhinged once more, and at one of the most perilous moments in its history the country was leaderless. The old intrigues for a Regency and a Fox ministry were recommenced, and the politicians forgot the national danger in their speculations as to the composition of a new administration. Pitt has been criticized for holding aloof, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion

that his attitude was due, not only to concern for the King's health, but also to a weariness of this sterile personal strife. The myopia of the Court and of Westminster was little to the taste of one who had accustomed himself to think imperially. If he were required to take office again he would do so, but for national, not personal or party, considerations. Events moved too fast for him, and by April he felt it his duty to expose the incapacity of ministers. On the 23rd of that month the Treasury Bench had to face the combined thunders of Pitt and Fox, and so ineffective was the Government in reply that its majority fell to thirty-seven. Addington thereupon advised the King, who was now convalescent, to get into touch with Pitt.

If the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports had been under any illusions about the influence of the new national spirit in the highest circles, he must soon have been disappointed when he had his audience at Buckingham House on May 7th. The King was still thinking of the Test Act, the Coronation Oath, and the shortcomings of Fox. Pitt's previous undertaking stood in the way of any attempt to secure Catholic Emancipation, and every effort to make the new government really representative by the inclusion of Fox was vetoed by the King. Pitt showed now that he had at last overcome his animosity to his rival, but it was all to no purpose. Grenville, too, would

not take office without Fox, and so the new administration was decidedly weak. There were no less than twelve members of the Cabinet, with Pitt at their head as First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. None of them was remarkable for his abilities, except Castlereagh at the Board of Control and Eldon on the Woolsack. As the composition of the ministry was in the nature of a compromise, the strong partizans had to be relegated to minor posts, and such was the fate of Canning. In effect, the team was a poor one, which meant that much even of the routine work would have to be done by the Prime Minister, who was already burdened with the conduct of the war. One thing is certainly clear, and it is that he behaved with his usual scrupulous honesty throughout, and there was no trace of faction in the attitude he adopted. While Pitt felt that he could conscientiously support Addington he continued to do so, and when he was convinced that the safety of the nation demanded the latter's removal, he endeavoured to bring this about in such a way as to give the minimum of offence.

On the day that Pitt took his seat after re-election, which was then obligatory on acceptance of office, Napoleon was proclaimed Emperor, and the rivals were face to face. The one was omnipotent, while the other had a weak Cabinet, a diminished Navy, and a monarch whom

opposition might at any moment drive out of his senses. The King was by no means the least of the Prime Minister's difficulties. He insisted on visiting Weymouth, which necessitated a great concentration of armed force in Dorset and off its coast, to the detriment of other parts of the kingdom more exposed to invasion, and his behaviour was at all times remarkably odd. He quarrelled with the Queen and with the Princesses, as well as with the Prince of Wales, and he would give the most embarrassing orders without previously consulting any of the appropriate authorities. On one occasion, for example, he ordered the construction of large barracks at Weymouth without even mentioning the matter to the War Office. The conduct of the Princess of Wales, too, already left much to be desired, so that Pitt had his hands full with the affairs of the Royal Family, which required the most tactful handling. It is impossible not to agree with Lady Hester Stanhope that Pitt's life during his second administration was "enough to kill a man – it was murder." Had the King allowed him to strengthen the ministry in the way he wished he would have been relieved of no small part of the burden which was to bring him to the grave in eighteen months.

The first task that confronted the Government was defence, and here Pitt's experience as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports stood him in good



stead. A Bill was passed to encourage recruiting, and further measures were taken to obstruct a landing in Kent. A canal was dug from Sandgate to Rye, and arrangements were made for the flooding of Romney Marsh in case of necessity, for it was there that the greatest danger appeared to threaten. Martello towers were erected first of all round Hythe and Dymchurch, and later in Pevensey Bay. Pitt took a personal interest in all this work, and the spectacle of the Prime Minister himself attending parades of the local Volunteers had a very good effect upon country gentlemen in all parts of the kingdom.

There was need for all the armaments that could be assembled, for in October, 1804, Spain was added to the number of Napoleon's satellites who were Britain's enemies. Pitt had already begun to organize another alliance of Powers against France, and he determined to strike a blow which could not fail to impress his potential allies. This was the seizure of three Spanish treasure-ships on the high seas, without a previous declaration of war against Spain, though not without notice that hostilities might be commenced at any moment unless Madrid ceased to give underhand assistance to Napoleon. It was the very blow which Chatham had wished to deliver over forty years before, but which his colleagues in the Cabinet had vetoed, and which had thus brought about his resignation. It was a

violation of international law, but Napoleon had created so many precedents in that connection that there could be little cause for complaint save on grounds of abstract morality, which tend to be ignored in time of war. However that may be, Parliament approved of Pitt's action in January, 1805, by a large majority ; and the position of the Government was further strengthened at this time by the adherence of Addington, who, as Viscount Sidmouth, took office as Lord President of the Council.

The new accession of strength was unhappily soon to be followed by a blow which did much to shorten the Prime Minister's life. Melville, now First Lord of the Admiralty, was charged on the report of a commission with having misapplied public money as Treasurer of the Navy in Pitt's former administration. What had happened was that he had been negligent in the extreme in that he had not prevented the Paymaster from engaging in private speculation with the naval balances. He had not himself touched a penny, but as head of the department affected he was responsible. Pitt was determined to do what he could for an old friend and colleague, and secured the support of the Cabinet for a motion to appoint a Select Committee of the House to make further investigations. The debate began on April 8th, and lasted well on into the morning of the following day. Pitt, Canning, and

Castlereagh defended Melville against the attacks of the Opposition, and at 4 a.m. Wilberforce rose. Pitt is said to have leant eagerly forward to hear what his oldest friend would have to say, but when that most upright of men supported the prosecution he sank back in obvious misery. The division showed an equality of votes ; and there was a dramatic silence while the Speaker, white as a sheet, made up his mind how he should give his casting vote. Finally, he voted against the Government, and there ensued a scene which testified at once to the enthusiasm and the bad manners of the Whigs. One member gave the "view halloa," and many crowded to the exit to see "how Billy Pitt looked after it." A few of the latter's supporters formed a phalanx round him, and Pitt was helped out of the House in a state bordering upon collapse. In due course Melville was impeached, but was acquitted on every count. When the news of Trafalgar arrived Pitt wrote to him in his retirement that his energy at the Admiralty had largely contributed to the victory.

In spite of the fact that he had enough worry at home to occupy all the time of a normal Prime Minister, Pitt never for a moment neglected the struggle against Napoleon. While Addington was still in office Gustavus IV of Sweden had suggested another coalition, this time between Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Sweden, to

withstand French aggression. The Czar agreed in July to join such a combination, and in the following month the Emperor followed his example. The object of this alliance was defined to be the expulsion of French troops from North Germany, the assured independence of Holland and Switzerland, and the restoration of the King of Sardinia to his continental possessions. Russia and such other Powers as might join were to provide 500,000 men, while Great Britain, instead of furnishing troops, was to supply £1,250,000 a year for every 100,000 men engaged in the campaign. After the war there was to be a conference to define more closely the law of nations, and to establish a European federation, where the states were to be independent, enjoying constitutions "founded on the sacred rights of humanity." In other words, there was to be a system of collective security, based on the aggrandizement of Austria and Sardinia in Northern Italy to check the ambition of France. Pitt was dead long before there was an opportunity to put these plans into execution, but they foreshadow what was effected by Castlereagh in the Treaty of Chaumont nine years later.

The French Emperor had by no means abandoned his intention of invading England, and in the late summer and early autumn his fertile brain was busy with projects for such a union of the French and Spanish fleets as should give him at

least temporary command of the Channel. At this time Nelson came home to "dear, dear Merton" for a month's rest, and during the course of it he was summoned by Pitt to an interview at Downing Street. In the ante-room he found the then Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, who had just returned from India. At the close of the interview, to quote Nelson, "Mr. Pitt paid me a compliment, which, I believe, he would not have paid to a Prince of the Blood. When I rose to go, he left the room with me, and attended me to the Carriage." Never again were these three to meet in life, and within six months two of them were dead. Indeed, the only ray of light that pierced the gloom of the few remaining weeks left to Pitt was Trafalgar, so that in spite of the rout of Britain's allies on the Continent he was justified in his famous statement at the Lord Mayor's Banquet on November 9th. His health had been proposed as the saviour of Europe, and he concentrated his reply in two sentences: "I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me; but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example."

On land Napoleon was still invincible, though had Prussia joined the Third Coalition when Pitt wished her to do so, the overthrow of the French Emperor would almost certainly have

been anticipated by seven years, to the incalculable benefit of Europe, which would thus have been spared the loss of blood and treasure that took place between 1805 and 1814. Before Trafalgar had been fought Napoleon had moved the "Army of England" from Boulogne to Central Europe, and had crushed the Austrian vanguard at Ulm. This was the moment when Prussian intervention would have been most effective, for the French line of communication through Germany could easily have been cut: in that case Napoleon would have been surrounded in Vienna by the numerically superior armies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. French diplomacy, however, kept Berlin neutral by dangling Hanover under the nose of Frederick William III, and on the snow-covered hillside of Austerlitz on December 2nd, 1805, the Third Coalition collapsed before the French charge. The turn of Prussia was soon to arrive, but for several years to come she had established the supremacy of Napoleon on the mainland of Europe.

When the news of Austerlitz reached England the Prime Minister was already a stricken man. The previous twelve months had subjected him to a strain which his health could not stand. An obstinate monarch, a Royal Family continually at loggerheads, a weak and divided Cabinet (Sidmouth had resigned in July), and an uncertain

majority in the House of Commons, were too much for him. Success in his projects for the overthrow of Napoleon could alone have restored him, and in place of success there was Austerlitz. The old enemy, gout, had returned soon after his appearance at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, and on November 27th we find Canning, whom Pitt was about to promote to Cabinet rank, pressing him not to delay his projected visit to Bath until it was too late to do him any good. Already he was so shaky that he could hardly raise a glass to his lips. Finally, he went to Bath on December 7th, and soon experienced some benefit from the change, for a few days later he wrote to Lord Harrowby, "I have been here for ten days, and have already felt the effect of the waters in a pretty smart fit of the gout from which I am just recovering, and of which I expect soon to perceive the benefit." His rest, however, was continually disturbed by the crowds who flocked to see him every time he appeared in public.

The last weeks of Pitt's life have been the sport of legend to an extent unknown in the case of any other modern British statesman. The most famous, immortalized by Hardy in *The Dynasts*, represents the weak and emaciated Prime Minister at Shockerwick House, near Bath, receiving the news of Austerlitz, and, after locating the village on a map of Europe, bidding his host, "Roll up that map : it will not be wanted these

ten years." According to another story these words were uttered to Lady Hester Stanhope as the dying Prime Minister entered his house at Putney. Unfortunately for romance the news of Austerlitz filtered through by degrees, and at first the battle was believed to have resulted in the defeat of the French. Moreover there is no sort of evidence that Pitt realized how ill he was. When he left Bath on January 9th, 1806, he took with him from a circulating library there Schiller's *History of the Thirty Years' War*, which is hardly the type of book likely to be chosen by one who knew that his end was only a matter of days.

The evidence is conflicting as to the way in which he stood the journey home; he went straight to Bowling Green House, on Putney Heath, which he had leased some eighteen months before. The doctors who visited him there on his return saw no cause for alarm, and on the 12th he wrote to the Marquess Wellesley, "I am recovering rather slowly from a series of stomach complaints, followed by severe attacks of gout, but I believe I am now in the way of real amendment." Yet the torture which he was suffering was as much mental as physical, and there can be little doubt but that the arrival of good news from the theatre of war even at this late hour would have cheated death of its victim. It was not to be. Instead there came Castlereagh and Hawkesbury to tell him of the vacillation of



Prussia, and to ask his authority for the withdrawal of the British troops which had been sent to Northern Europe on the assumption that Frederick William would join the Third Coalition. This proved to be more than he could bear, and death must have seemed preferable to inevitable defeat at the hands of a joyful Opposition. On the 14th he saw Lord Wellesley, who testified that his brain was as clear as ever, and to whom he said of his brother, the subsequent victor of Waterloo, "He states every difficulty before he undertakes any service, but none after he has undertaken it." Pitt fainted after this interview, and although he rallied for a time, there never was any real hope again. He died three hours before dawn on January 23rd, 1806, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his entry into Parliament, and his last words, in spite of ingenious conjectures to the contrary, were peculiarly fitting, "My country! How I leave my country!"

Even in death the hatred of the Opposition pursued him, for it was not unanimously, but by 258 votes to 59, that the House of Commons accorded him burial in Westminster Abbey; while by the narrow majority of six the Common Council of the City of London decided to erect a monument to the man who had saved the country from bankruptcy.

In attempting to assess Pitt's place in British history, it is first of all necessary to remember the circumstances of the time. Attention has already been called to the fact that it was a period of economic and social change, and it was also one of political uncertainty. Outwardly, the Constitution was as it had been in the reign of William III, and was to be in that of George V (save for the modifications caused by the Parliament Act of 1911), but that tells the enquirer nothing, for it is the spirit, not the letter, of the British Constitution which is important. In the last two decades of the eighteenth century it was by no means easy for contemporaries to decide where power really lay. The name of Pitt is so often mentioned in the same breath, or in the same paragraph, as that of Peel, Gladstone, or Disraeli that there is a real danger of forgetting that he had to work in very different circumstances from those which they knew. In their day constitutional practice was more or less stabilized ; in his it was still in a state of flux. When he first entered the House of Commons the ministers were the mere puppets of the monarch ; yet less than a generation before both Crown and Parliament had been controlled by the great Whig families. Nor was this all, for men still in the prime of the life could recall a certain Monday when the King was preparing to return to Hanover, and the whole Revolution settlement was in jeopardy. It was a situation

compared with which that of his successors was easy.

Such being the case Pitt, during his first years of office, had to base his policy to no inconsiderable extent not upon party or upon principle, but upon his ability to reconcile conflicting interests. A lesser man would have failed, and Britain would have gone the way of France. He had two assets : the state of the country, which made it ready to accept heroic remedies, and his own personality. Pitt knew what he wanted, and he had the ability to get it. He had, of course, the advantage of his name, but that would not have carried him on for long had it been unsupported by character. His courage during the early weeks of 1784 won him the respect of his fellow-countrymen, and he never lost it. Perhaps the contrast with the deeply suspect Fox was another point in his favour. The Englishman's heart may be on the Left, but his pocket is on the Right, and Pitt looked after his pocket. In some indefinable way he came to impress the ordinary citizen that while he was at the helm, all would be well, and while the factions were raging against him at Westminster the farmers at Shepton Mallet took the horses out of his carriage, and pulled it through the town.

When allowance has been made for the difference of circumstances it is with the statesmen of the nineteenth century that Pitt must be associated. He looks forward to them, rather than

back to Bolingbroke. His Toryism, though he would have objected to the word, was that of Canning, Peel, and Salisbury, not of Clarendon. Disraeli claimed to be the disciple of Pitt and Canning, but he had little affinity with the outlook of either. It was both his strength and his weakness that he was unique. References to the "Asian Mystery" and the "Venetian Constitution" would have wakened no responsive chord in Pitt. The latter was very definitely a realist, and the philosophy of politics made no appeal to him. There is no evidence that he ever read a line of Bolingbroke, and he was certainly quite uninfluenced by Burke. In practice he established a balance of the Constitution, though in the Cabinet he was an autocrat. On the other hand he was deeply interested in political economy, for which neither of them cared a fig. His speeches show the man. Compared with those of his contemporaries they are models of reasoned argument, and although he could hit out when the occasion demanded it, he avoided declamation and mere rhetoric as a general rule. In this, too, Pitt pointed the way to the future. At the same time, he lost nothing by his innovation, for from his first appearance in the House of Commons to his last he dominated that assembly as few Prime Ministers have done before or since, and that in the golden age of Parliament in this country. One wonders how many of his successors, given his

circumstances, could have held a majority together against the attacks of Fox, Burke, Sheridan and Windham. Both in Parliament and elsewhere he had a power of command in which, in the annals of Britain, he is equalled by his father alone.

If Pitt had no political philosophy in the sense that Bolingbroke and Disraeli understood the term, his career ushered in a new period in British politics. He would have scorned Disraeli's attempt to establish spiritual kinship with the Cavaliers, and of the four loyalties of the Tory, namely "High Church, High Toryism, High Farming, and Old Port," it was the last two alone that made any appeal to him. Yet he initiated the removal of many of the abuses which the Revolution had inflicted upon the country, and he set Britain firmly upon the path of reform. The war slowed down his pace, just as the opposition of vested interests was also liable to do, and after 1815 some of those who had been his lieutenants mistook his policy for resistance to all change. They forgot that the measures he was forced to take during the war years were forced upon him by necessity, and were not the result of his choice. Nevertheless, his example remained, and men like Canning saw to it that the torch he had lighted was not allowed to go out. It was the same in Imperial matters. British statesmen had lost interest in colonies after the War of American

Independence, but Pitt laid the foundations of a second Empire in South Africa, in Canada, and in India.

Among the many claims which Pitt has to being the greatest of British Prime Ministers is the fact that he enabled the country to pass from the old order to the new without any violent upheaval. He was not a reformer as Gladstone was a reformer, but he did not live in an age that would tolerate any sweeping reforms, as he learnt to his cost. One can hardly over-stress the point that unless a genius had been in office from 1784 to 1792 Great Britain must have gone the way of France. Bankruptcy is a very common cause of revolution, and had Pitt merely averted that his claim to statesmanship of the highest order would have to be conceded. He did more than that. He showed how change might be effected within the framework of the Constitution, and the ablest of his successors were not slow to assimilate the lesson. He understood the new Britain, to which the Revolution families and Brooks's meant nothing, that was coming into existence, and he took care that to achieve its end there should be no need for the periodic upheavals which convulsed so many countries on the mainland of Europe.

It has already been suggested that Pitt was not so poor a wartime Prime Minister as has so often been alleged : Miranda, assuredly no mean judge,

credited him personally with such successes as England gained during his tenure of office. However that may be, as a leader he was unsurpassed, and in the darkest days of 1797-98 his courage was the fire from which others kindled theirs. It was the memory of what he had done that nerved his successors to continue the struggle until his great antagonist was an exile, and France was back within her old frontiers. Perhaps the most fitting epitaph is contained in the words of Lord Wellesley at his funeral, "What grave contains such a father and such a son?"

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